Ridván 2020 Annual Report

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States





NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

April 3, 2020

To the American Bahá'í community

Dearest Friends,

Work on this Annual Report had barely begun when the outbreak of COVID-19, first reported in other parts of the world, continued to gather force and rapidly reached the dimensions of a global pandemic, affecting large numbers of people in this country and requiring mitigating social action on a scale most of us have never before seen.

As this is written, a growing majority of us are experiencing limitations on our freedom of movement and association with others—prudent measures designed by governmental and public health authorities to curb the virus's spread. These measures have obviously had an effect on our ability to carry out the many tasks necessary to produce this report, but we have managed to find new and creative ways to conduct the work successfully.

The entire Bahá'í community of the United States has, of course, similarly been experiencing the effects of these measures and we commend the positive spirit, faithfulness, courage, tenacity, and inventiveness with which you have responded, carrying on undiminished our vital work of building vibrant communities on a new and unimaginably glorious spiritual foundation. Together, with unity of purpose and full trust in the all-conquering power of the Cause we hold sacred, we will without a doubt surmount the formidable challenges of this hour as we have so many others in the history of this many-times blessed community.

With our deepest love,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

Kenneth E. Bowers

Secretary





Ridván 2020 Annual Report

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Beloved Friends and Co-workers,

At this significant juncture in the course of the Five Year Plan, we join you in celebrating, with hearts moved to profound gratitude to the Blessed Beauty, the contributions of the American Bahá'í community to the Plan's realization thus far. We are, as you know, presently in the midst of a period characterized by the Universal House of Justice as one of great spiritual potency, encompassing the worldwide commemorations of events at the very heart of the history of our Faith. In 2016, we observed the hundredth anniversary of the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "charter for the spiritual conquest of the planet." In 2017 and 2019, we celebrated the bicentenaries of the Births of the Twin Manifestations of God for this Age, which were observed with joy and reverence in countless gatherings, notably diverse in their size and location, in the race, ethnicity, gender, and age of their participants, and in their inventiveness and style.

In a recent message to the Bahá'ís of the world, the House of Justice especially noted the accomplishments made in the two-year span between the bicentenaries:

The measure of what you have achieved—not only in the last few weeks, but during a two-year period of remarkable advance now brought to a stunning climax—compels us to address you who are the visible hosts of a movement that has proved itself irrepressible. Far from being merely a memorable event, the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb was the fruit of eight cycles of devoted effort, carried out in unity and with a sense of

undaunted initiative. We rejoiced to see the friends so assured in their response to the call to service. Local communities, neighbourhoods, and villages became arenas for intensified activity of all kinds, as the knowledge of what the community could accomplish—witnessed at the last bicentenary—prompted a release of tremendous energy and enterprise, supported by a sound process of preparation and reflection.

Achievements in the United States were no exception to the worldwide advancements of the period. Taken together, they testify to the efforts of a national Bahá'í community whose three chief protagonists—the individual, the institutions, and the local community—are steadily gaining maturity and strength. Their growing capacity to create patterns of a new and distinctive form of community life that is widely inclusive, loving, vibrant, and unifying will serve as a beacon of hope to their increasingly disheartened fellow citizens.

The aims of the current Plan and the elements of growth necessary to achieve such a pattern of community life have all been fully elucidated by the Supreme Body and are well known to you. We will not attempt to reprise that guidance here; rather, we draw your attention to a few important developments, closely interrelated and vital to our work in the year ahead.

First, there is an increasing appreciation in the community of the concept of an "expanding nucleus" of people, believers and others, who are advancing together along a path through which they are steadily gaining capacity for service. Some have developed capacity to facilitate the training of others by serving as tutors of study circles; others have advanced to the point where they are facilitating other core activities, while working and learning side by side with a group of friends; still others are participating in a variety of activities—many of these will sooner or later enter into study of the sequence of courses; and still others are involved in meaningful conversations that will lead to some form of increased engagement in the life of the community. Souls in each of these categories reflect the full range of diversity of age and background found in the larger society, reflecting the power of attraction inherent in the Bahá'í spirit of inclusiveness and unity and its ability to see souls as potential contributors to the transformation of society.

Second, there has been a marked increase in both the consistency and coherence of our efforts. To take the bicentenary celebrations as a single example, it was clear that in the majority of communities there was widespread understanding that these historic occasions were not events taking place in isolation from the work of community building; on the contrary, the friends engaged in a great deal of effort to share the importance of the events with others in the months leading up to the observances. As a result, an unprecedented number of people from the larger community celebrated these occasions with us, in many instances assisting in the planning of programs and participating in them. Such interactions helped to strengthen processes already well established in cluster after cluster.

Similarly, a more conscious effort is being made to think of the core activities of a community as parts of an organic whole, as when parents of junior youth are invited to participate in various ways; or when those taking part in devotional gatherings are invited to enter the main sequence of courses or have their children join in Bahá'í activities. Even individual initiatives such as firesides are now more determinedly linked to the program of growth in a cluster. In this manner, all of the facets of life in a cluster are seen as interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Finally, it is clear that capacity for learning, anchored in regular cycles of study, action, and reflection, is gaining strength. This is best evidenced in the remarkable advancements in programs of growth throughout the country.

There are now 627 clusters where a program of growth is in operation. In 334 of these, a handful of individuals are participating in nascent efforts facilitated by one or two individuals. At the same time, some 293 have developed a level of intensity such that 10 or more are facilitating the participation of a hundred or so others in community-building efforts that feature a full array of activities.

In 249 clusters, the friends had already achieved this level of intensity at the outset of the current Plan; they now had the task of fostering growth to the point where a hundred or more core activities were engaging up to a thousand or more people of all ages in various facets of community life. Across the entire Bahá'í community, there were just eight clusters at the current Plan's beginning that had achieved this third milestone of growth. At Riḍván 2019, there were 19 such clusters. At this writing, there are now 34 such clusters, testifying to a remarkable acceleration in growth in virtually every region of the country. And these clusters have continued to advance the frontiers of growth, demonstrating potential to embrace many thousands more in the years to come, even as others will surely join their ranks in the concluding year of the Plan.

These developments are the outcome of a great deal of learning about teaching the Cause in an accelerated and sustainable manner. They represent victories that have not easily been won, and have underscored the truth of the House of Justice's assertion that there are no shortcuts to achieving growth. On the contrary, growth depends upon increasingly deeper understandings gained in field experience. To the extent that we gain this experience, we see both heightened confidence and positive results.

We have also come to appreciate that the Plan is not a mere set of activities to be counted. Its real purpose is the development of human capacity—of assisting each and every individual to mine the "gems of inestimable value" that have been deposited in him or her by an all-loving Creator. Refining this potential comes about through a process uniting one's interaction with the sacred Word with its application in the field of service. To provide such opportunities for multitudes of souls requires constant, focused effort, combined with learning. It will call upon us to achieve unity of thought, a spirit of consecration, and an attitude of reliance on the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty.

We are especially pleased that the efforts of the friends have enabled the community to embrace an astonishing diversity of people of every conceivable background. Of the 57,000 people now involved in core activities of some kind, nearly 40 percent are not members of the Bahá'í Faith. They are chiefly peoples whose contributions to the rise of the American nation have been rich and of great historical significance, whether they be African Americans or American Indians or more recent immigrant populations—all of whom the House of Justice has especially encouraged us to reach.

You are well aware not only of the National Spiritual Assembly's series of letters to the community linking the issue of race unity in America to the pursuit of the Plan, but also have surely read the many letters from the

Universal House of Justice on the same subject, shared with you over the course of the past several years. We should never lose sight of the fact that the achievement of a society characterized by inclusiveness, equality, and justice, free from all forms of racial prejudice, is the very heart and soul of our mission as Bahá'ís.

This calls to mind a statement made by the House of Justice to the believers in North America at the outset of the current Plan, in a message commemorating the 100th anniversary of the revelation of the first of the Tablets of the Divine Plan:

The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society.

This is a time for jubilation. Take pride in the sacrifices and victories of so many devoted souls who arose in response to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call. With the same spirit of renunciation shown by your predecessors, cast away the idle fancies and distractions of a world that has lost its way that you may consecrate yourselves in the next five years to the priceless opportunities and inescapable obligations of the latest stage of a spiritual enterprise on which the fate of humanity ultimately depends.

Finally, as there can be little doubt about the increasing distress of our fellow citizens, neither can there be any question about our own deep and inescapable responsibility to build a pattern of life that offers them hope for a better world. As the Universal House of Justice wrote:

The reality that there is abundant receptivity in the world at large is not in doubt. Progress depends on developing the capacity to extend the community-building process further still. And so all eyes turn to the months ahead. The devotion to the Twin Divine Luminaries and to the well-being of humanity which inspired your noble exertions thus far must sustain you in the coming six cycles. We urge everyone who worked to bring about this success to hasten now and gather again to reflect and to consult, and to determine how best to apply, in each unique setting, all that your experience has taught you: how an expanding nucleus of friends can cultivate a growing pattern of activity; how children can advance to the next grade and junior youth to the succeeding text, further developing their moral and spiritual qualities; how institute courses can yield much-needed skills and capacities; how the path of service can widen to accommodate large numbers; how real hope for the betterment of society can be

demonstrated in action; and how all of God's peoples can be enabled to take inspiration from His new Revelation, and souls who are receptive can be invited to identify with the Cause of the Abhá Beauty. In this continuing period of special potency, at an hour when the world seems powerless in the face of overwhelming peril and souls have succumbed to dismay and despair, Bahá'u'lláh has shown us another glimpse of what the community that bears His name can accomplish through courage—even heroism—in the discharge of its God-given mission. We will pray earnestly in the Holy Shrines for His unfailing confirmations to surround every child and every youth, every woman and every man, every family and every community that treasures His love in their hearts.

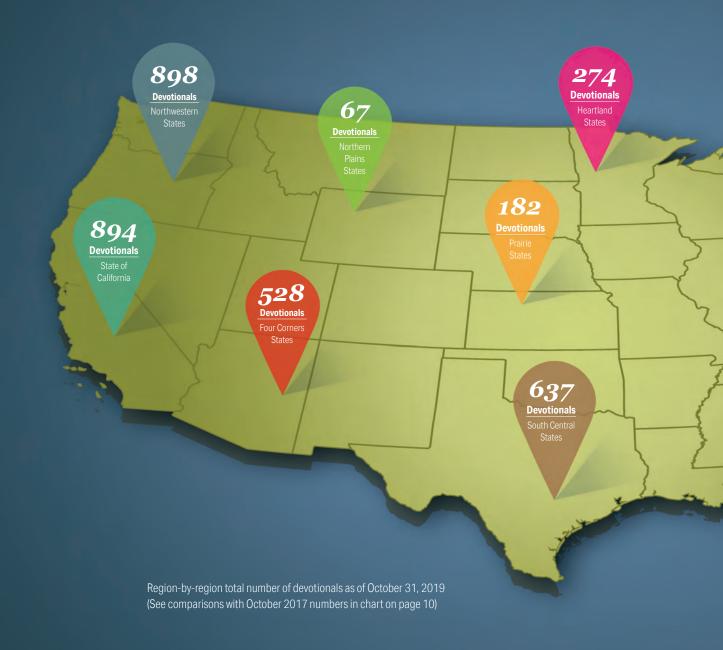
The following pages chronicle the principal lines of action undertaken by this Assembly and its subsidiaries over the course of the past year. In the broad range of these diverse endeavors you will see our community's continuing efforts to foster patterns of activity at every level to apply Bahá'u'lláh's life-giving teachings to the many needs of our time. We hope you will pay particular attention to the strategies by which the Regional Bahá'í Councils and Regional Training Institutes are, in their respective areas of service, advancing the development of clusters. A concise and helpful summary of recent national developments is provided by our Learning Desk in the pages preceding the reports of the Regional Councils.

Tens of thousands in this country are now walking together in the path of service. Your devoted efforts—founded in love for the Blessed Beauty, unified by fidelity to His Covenant, expressed in a common appreciation for His teachings, and fortified by trust in His unfailing assistance—will steadily and inevitably create communities that will serve as spiritual havens for our sisters and brothers in this great land. We take this opportunity to express to you once more our boundless love and deepest gratitude for your devoted and sacrificial efforts.

We also wish to express the abiding love and warm appreciation we feel for the members of the Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas and their Auxiliaries—as well as for the members of our 12 Regional Bahá'í Councils and Regional Training Institutes, and for those who serve with great devotion in our various offices and agencies. Their tireless services contribute beyond measure to the success and well-being of this community and, taken together with the efforts of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the nation, set the stage for wondrous achievements in the auspicious year ahead.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES



1,013 **Devotionals Devotionals** 1,268 234 Devotionals Devotionals 693 Devotionals

National developments in expansion and consolidation

Prepared by the Learning Desk

"Far from being merely a memorable event, the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb was the fruit of eight cycles of devoted effort, carried out in unity and with a sense of undaunted initiative."

-Universal House of Justice, November 8, 2019

t each of the historic bicentenaries in this Five Year Plan, in 2017 and 2019, the US Bahá'í community's remarkable efforts provided evidence of a fresh impulse of potent spiritual forces. Still, the Universal House of Justice told us, it was in the eight cycles between these two celebrations that the greatest share of effort needed to fulfill the goals of the Plan would be required. It seems opportune, then, to consider a number of achievements from these middle eight cycles—a period the Supreme Institution characterized as "a two-year period of remarkable advance"—and to look ahead to the final cycles of the Plan.

Advances at the neighborhood level

Successive stages in the execution of the beloved Master's Divine Plan have demonstrated time and again the potential for large numbers of people to embrace the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Since the House of Justice's introduction of training institutes in 1996 and the subsequent designation and growth of core community-building activities, Bahá'ís worldwide have been striving to learn, through that framework of activity, how to sustain such growth.

In 2010, the Universal House of Justice drew attention to the need to focus on small pockets of the population in a cluster, which could become centers of intense activity. During the



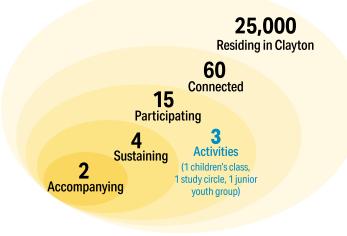
eight cycles between the two bicentenaries, notable advances emerged in this regard.

 In clusters across the country, we have seen how a small team, committed to being one with the population, can quickly grow to include many others eager to act on the transformative vision of Bahá'u'lláh.

Small adjustments in thinking over the past two years have had an important impact on growth in neighborhoods. Rather than focusing on activities as ends in themselves, those involved in the process are learning to pay attention to individual participants-to think about their progress, be responsive to their needs and to their desire to serve, and support them beyond the activities. Many of these participants are already acting as protagonists in building community: sharing what they are learning with others, inviting friends, and proposing action that reflects the reality of their people. These insights into the movement of a population toward Bahá'u'lláh go hand in hand with a deeper sense of humility as we witness a process in which individuals, families, groups, and entire communities are connecting with the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and beginning to transform.

A team thinking in these ways can quickly expand to reach a quantifiable percentage of a population in a town or neighborhood. For example, in the first year of the Plan a couple settled in Clayton, North Carolina, a town of 25,000 in Johnston County, a Milestone 1 cluster near the Triangle. A junior youth program graduate was already holding a children's class in a neighborhood of 3,000. Within a few months, their conversations with young people led to formation of a study circle, and by the end of summer they formed a junior youth group. With steady effort, this nucleus of participants grew by October 2019 to 16 people serving

Two-year expansion of the community-building process in Clayton, North Carolina



October 2017

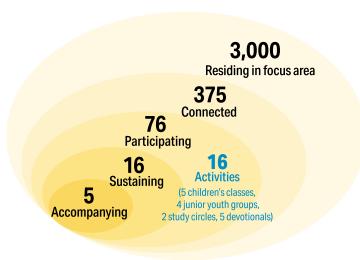
in some way, with about 75 participating in the activities (see charts above).

Nationwide, in about 30 such "new" neighborhoods— where efforts began only in the past few years—people who entered the institute process have arisen to serve the growing community. This is in addition to many neighborhoods with long-standing activity that have drawn on established strengths in continuing a process of expansion and consolidation.

 Use of the training institute is being strengthened to help friends who are new to the Faith, particularly young people, develop capacity for service.

In January 2015, the Universal House of Justice brought to our attention the observation that learning to work with large numbers of youth would "naturally shape the next phase of development of training institutes." Early in the Plan, considerable effort in response to this guidance helped attract groups of youth to Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new World Order. While many began studying Ruhi Book 1, it was difficult for them to progress together through institute courses and to sustain core activities. Then in the middle eight cycles, as the focus shifted toward responding to individuals and their circumstances, varied approaches were applied to accommodate people with different paces and different schedules—such as intensive campaigns, regular study circles, or one-on-one study.

Regular sleep-away camps have been key in involving young people. In an atmosphere of prayer and study, groups delve deeply into institute materials for periods ranging from a weekend to several days or a few weeks. About 50 US neighborhoods, including at least one in every region, have been learning to incorporate such



October 2019

intensive study gatherings into the rhythm of an annual calendar that corresponds to local reality. At the same time, we continue to learn about assisting youth to take action in the field of service while also supporting them in all aspects of their lives, as they continue studies, pursue careers, choose spouses, and start families.

 The community is overcoming the tendency to jump from one focus to another and instead is seeing the work with children, junior youth, youth, and whole families as elements of a single endeavor.

The middle eight cycles of this Plan have witnessed notable advances in capacity to help youth move through the institute and arise to serve. In previous Plans, considerable experience was built in the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. Now, in many regions, junior youth group graduates are proving especially steady in progressing through the institute courses, taking ownership of progress in their neighborhoods and towns, and arising to serve. In place of a tendency to shift focus from junior youth to youth and back again, we witness greater awareness of how the engagement of youth and junior youth can be mutually reinforcing. Moreover, deeper connections are being formed with the families of these young people so that parents and other family members can play their own roles in the community-building process.

In the Vickery Meadow neighborhood in Dallas, for example, three siblings in the junior youth program, with the help of an animator, studied a quotation about prayer with their mother and enthusiastically shared with their family the prayers they say in group meetings. Soon, the family started holding weekly family devotions. The siblings look forward to helping others in their junior youth group start devotionals with their own families.

During the summer of 2017, some 160 clusters nationwide had at least one junior youth group. By the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, this figure increased to more than 250. At least 45 of these clusters have developed experience helping these young people transition from the junior youth program into the main sequence of courses.

Regional institutional capacity

The exciting developments at the grass roots have been closely connected to growth of regional institutional capacity. The same elements that have shifted in the thinking of those serving in neighborhoods and small towns—of paying attention to individuals, of an ever-expanding group of friends tending to the community, and so on—have also influenced the thinking at the regional level for increasing capacity across many clusters or groups of clusters.

 Much of what has been learned in neighborhoods and towns is connected to a learning process strengthened at the regional level.

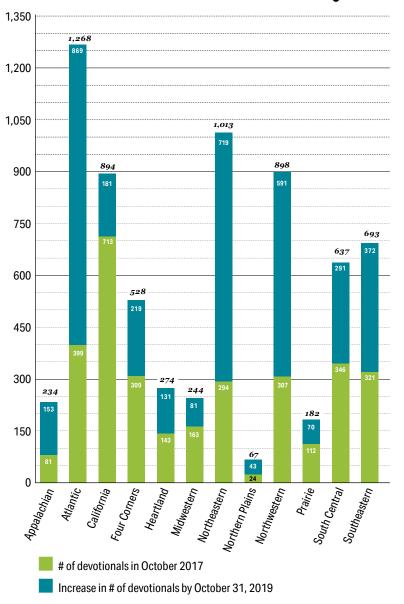
As tutors, animators, and coordinators strive to learn about the dynamics that help young people develop capacity for service, they need space to step back and reflect on what has been happening. They gain insights by reviewing relevant guidance, returning to sections of institute courses, and analyzing patterns across many experiences. During the middle eight cycles, Regional Training Institutes strengthened their ability to create such spaces for reflection at the regional level—recognizing that even as tutors, animators, and children's class teachers are learning within their small groups at the grass roots, they also learn together in conversations that flow from the grass roots to the regional level and back again.

In the Midwestern States, a learning process began just before the 2017 bicentenary. At the time, only a couple of teams were working in neighborhoods, with a handful of junior youth groups and young people in the institute across the whole region. By the 2019 bicentenary, over 10 teams were working in neighborhoods regularly benefiting from the regional reflection space; some 250 young people had entered the institute, and the junior youth program had grown to over 40 groups in the region with almost 240 participants.

 Institutions at all levels are learning to respond quickly and effectively in applying a flow of resources to needs and opportunities related to growth.

Rather than a scheme of oversight and management, the relationships among cluster, regional, and national institutions and agencies are increasingly characterized by love and trust in the friends at the forefront of the work and a desire to ensure they have what is needed to progress.

Growth in the number of devotionals in each region



For instance, the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Prairie States, in collaboration with Auxiliary Board members, has striven to ensure that any needs are quickly addressed—from simple things like ink for printing fliers, to vans and logistical support for institute camps, to living spaces for homefront pioneers. At the same time, the Council is learning to accompany cluster agencies in achieving similar swift responses to address needs and meet opportunities, and to put in place complementary mechanisms such as a contact person to check in with period-of-service volunteers.

Similarly, the Bahá'í Publishing Trust and the Learning Desk, two agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly, collaborated to produce small prayer books and The Hidden Words in Swahili and Kinyarwanda, literature much needed in work with populations speaking those languages in neighborhoods throughout our nation. Opportunities for further developments are likely in the coming year.

 Institutions at all levels are advancing in their capacity to encourage and support participation by believers across a cluster.

Concrete and ambitious goals, greater institutional collaboration, and stronger support mechanisms have widened believers' participation in the communitybuilding process during the Plan's middle eight cycles, particularly in the number of devotional meetings, which more than doubled (see chart at left). In such regions as the Appalachian, Atlantic, Northeastern, and Northwestern States-which each saw the numbers of their devotional gatherings roughly triple over those two years— Regional Councils established audacious goals to strengthen the devotional character of communities as a gift to the Báb on the occasion of the bicentenary of His Birth.

The Councils opened new channels to increase participation by encouraging Local Spiritual Assemblies to help the believers find ways to contribute. In Albany, New York, for example, the Northeastern Council's call led the Assembly to strengthen its own devotional character, opening each meeting with a round of prayers rather than just one or two. Five of its members were inspired to start devotional gatherings in their own

homes. As they began inviting friends and acquaintances to participate, two new study circles also began. In this way, a small action to contribute to the region's large goals led to a number of other natural steps and opened the way for the friends to take action that had previously seemed daunting.

Movement of clusters

These and other developments have contributed to growing momentum in the movement of clusters past new milestones of development, a major goal of this Plan. Reflecting an acceleration starting in the middle period of the Plan, more clusters attained new milestones between Ridván 2019 and January 2020—especially passing the second and third milestones—



than in any previous 12-month period. It is clear we are learning about the dynamics necessary for growth. In particular, the number of third-milestone clusters embracing large numbers has more than quadrupled so far this Plan, from eight to 34. This entails not only developments in centers of intense activity, but also growth in Area Teaching Committees' capacity to help increasing numbers of friends across the cluster find their place in contributing. Eleven out of 12 regions now have at least one cluster at this stage of development, no doubt lending energy to the further movement of clusters throughout every region.

A handful of these third-milestone clusters are working to further push the frontiers of learning and to discover the dynamics necessary to sustain some 500 activities, facilitating the participation of several thousand souls in the community-building process. Toward this end, the International Teaching Center facilitated a January 2019 visit to Sydney, Australia, by teams from the Triangle, Phoenix, San Diego, and Los Angeles clusters. This experience allowed the friends to identify a number of characteristics that seem to contribute to a stronger community-building process. These include spiritual conditions—deep love, a spirit of service, confidence in and encouragement of one another, and a stirring devotional characterand practical mechanisms to take care of the logistical and material needs of growth as swiftly as possible. Once these teams returned home, their clusters in turn hosted representatives from a number of other clusters to connect them with the same process of learning.

These visits were integrated with the pattern of mutual support among clusters and regions that has been developing in the past few years. Groupings of clusters are holding shared institute campaigns, tutor reflection gatherings, and other activities. Mobile resources are

traveling regularly among them to lend a hand and share experience. Clusters with the greatest experience are inviting neighboring friends to participate in their efforts and learn alongside them.

Across the borders of regions, people engaging similar populations are coming together to reflect and learn about patterns of action that release potential. In the past year, tutors and institute participants from such clusters have gathered at the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute to reflect on the community-building process in predominantly African-American neighborhoods, and at the Native American Bahá'í Institute to reflect on the process among Native Americans in rural areas and reservations. Further, Louhelen Bahá'í School has been the site of gatherings for larger numbers to study institute courses and reflect on the community-building process in places with populations of Swahili, Kinyarwanda, and Arabic speakers.

Implications for the final six cycles of the Plan

In 1996, the Universal House of Justice stated that North America has "opportunities for the advancement of the process of entry by troops, the like of which presently exist in no other place on earth." Two decades later, it asked the Bahá'í world to "spare no effort in applying all you have learned and every God-given ability and skill you possess to advance the Divine Plan into its next essential stage." Advances in the past 20 years, particularly the past two, have set the stage for great achievements during the final year of the Plan. Already the institutions of the Faith in the US community are unifying their vision around strategies that can add further impetus to growth during these last cycles. Among these are encouragement, support, and assistance to the entire company of believers-every one of whom is needed if we are to accomplish the "herculean labor" of this Plan and invite more and more people to contribute their share to the spiritual revival of the planet.





Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb



n November 8, 2019, a letter from the Universal House of Justice looked back at the 200th anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, viewing its global celebrations not only as achievements made visible in the span of a few weeks, but as the "stunning climax" of "a two-year period of remarkable advance" since the bicentenary in 2017 of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh. "Far from being merely a memorable event," the Supreme Body noted, the celebration was "the fruit of eight cycles of devoted effort, carried out in unity and with a sense of undaunted initiative."

Across the United States just as worldwide, the Twin Holy Birth-days served in many ways to illumine the vision of Bahá'u'lláh for humanity and the station of the Báb as the Gate to the emergence of that vision. Many gatherings utilized <u>Dawn of the Light</u>, a film produced at the Bahá'í World Center, as a starting point for conversations.

Whether held in homes, neighborhood settings, or larger venues, the celebrations reflected years of effort to enlist family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers in a process of community building. And the spirit they engendered points the way toward ever-greater engagement for the common good in years ahead.

Statistics collected and analyzed by the National Statistics Office, reported by individuals and Local Spiritual Assemblies, show that more than 3,200 events during the bicentenary involved nearly 110,000 participants—40 percent of whom are friends of the Faith. A handful of additional initiatives, such as radio and newspaper features and new songs posted on social media, potentially reached many thousands more.

Just as striking was the breadth of the ways in which communities prepared over the previous months to make the most of this opportunity for inspiring even more souls to enlist in a common mission.

"There are so many highlights to acknowledge," the House of Justice wrote in its November 8 letter, outlining six general areas of endeavor:

- Celebrations within families and among families. Bahá'ís and friends throughout the country opened their homes to friends, neighbors, and co-workers, or invited families to neighborhood spaces. Gatherings were characterized by hospitality, storytelling by all ages, and a devotional spirit. Many who had already been engaged in core activities were invited not only to attend but also to help plan and carry out the programs.
- Gatherings organized by youth for their peers. Young people were at the forefront of celebrations large and small. In some cases, they planned and initiated activities for their peers or community. In others, they made an indelible impression as part of a wider commemoration of the bicentenary. Contributions included innovative devotional gatherings; artistic offerings; and service projects, often involving accompaniment of children and junior youth.
- Retellings of the lives of the Báb and His early disciples. Many celebrations conveyed the faith, sacrifice, and resilience of the Báb and His followers. Whether through direct storytelling, dramatic presentation, or interactive learning activities, this thread of endeavor often relied on capacities built through study circles, reading projects, junior youth groups, and children's classes.

· Conversations on the needs of society.

Introduction of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, as well as the film *Dawn of the Light*, gave rise to hundreds of conversations about how to bring peace and unity to individuals, families, neighborhoods, and society in general. At large publicized events, intimate family-centered gatherings, and preparatory conferences leading to the bicentenary, conversations explored such themes as the oneness of humanity, racial justice and amity, the equality of women and men, and the potential of spiritual education.

Artistic works and creative expressions

of devotion. Spiritually informed by prayers and passages from the Bahá'í writings, Bahá'ís and friends created, performed, and displayed works that instilled joy in hearts and hope in minds. They could be large-scale—music and dramatic works created for the occasion, breathtaking visual installations and exhibitions, choral and dance performances reflecting the nation's cultural breadth—or hands-on crafts and collaborative projects.

· Invitations to engage with the institute.

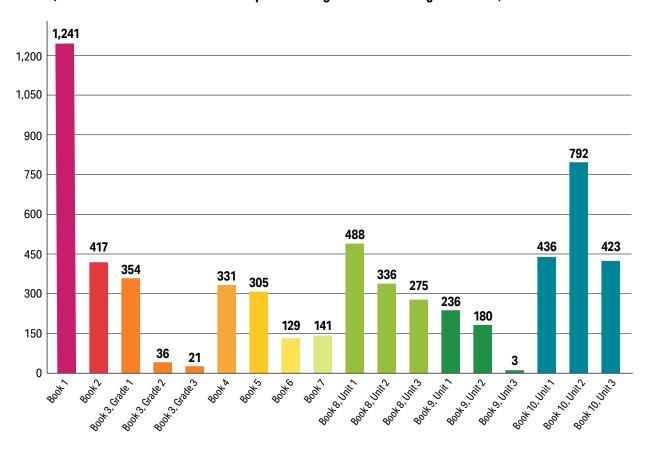
Many gatherings included direct invitations to explore the core activities. Especially at the neighborhood level, numerous events drew on capacities for conversation that had been built in children's classes and junior youth groups, as well as the involvement of the participants' families. Others were enriched by relationships established through home visits or other occasions for meaningful conversation. Afterward, individuals and communities continued to stay engaged with those who had joined in the celebrations.

Looking ahead to the remainder of the Plan, the Supreme Body wrote: "The devotion to the Twin Divine Luminaries and to the well-being of humanity which inspired your noble exertions thus far must sustain you in the coming six cycles. We urge everyone who worked to bring about this success to hasten now and gather again to reflect and to consult, and to determine how best to apply, in each unique setting, all that your experience has taught you."

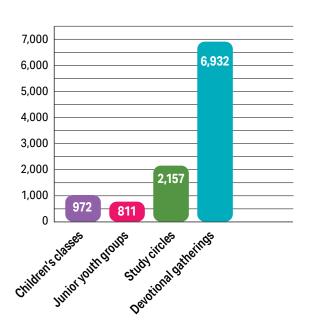


National statistics overview

6,144 books of the Ruhi Institute completed during 12 months ending October 31, 2019

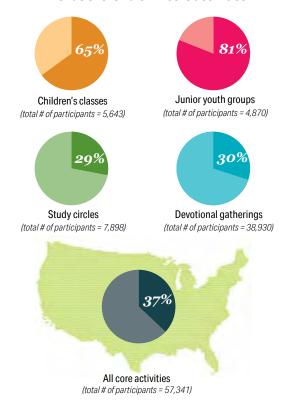


Core activities underway as of October 31, 2019

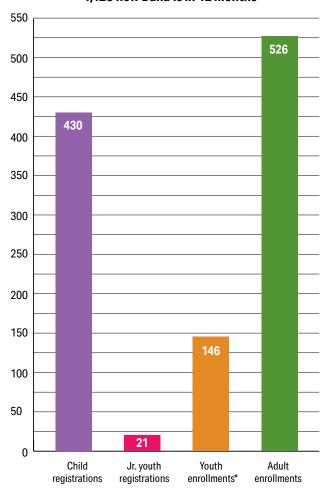


Sources: Five Year Plan Progress Survey, including April 30, 2019, and October 31, 2019 reporting cycles

Friends of the Faith in core activities



1,123 new Bahá'ís in 12 months



*Does not include several hundred Bahá'ís who were registered as children and turned 15 during the year. Source: UnityWeb, for the year ending March 1, 2020

Selected membership statistics in 12 months

Deaths	459
Withdrawals	347
Transfers out	18
New USA arrivals	307
Returning to USA	192
Membership reinstatements	57

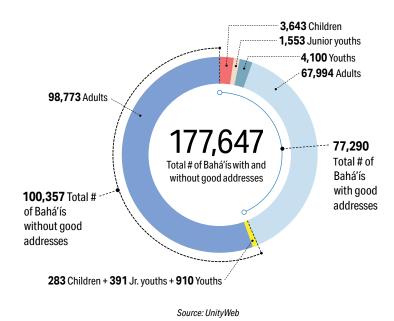
Source: UnityWeb, for the year ending March 1, 2020

974 Local Spiritual Assembies in US, by region

Appalachian	19	Northeastern	81
Atlantic	88	Northern Plains	25
California	203	Northwestern	113
Four Corners	92	Prairie	29
Heartland	62	South Central	88
Midwestern	39	Southeastern	135

Source: National database, as of March 1, 2020

US Bahá'í population on March 1, 2020



Social and economic development endeavors

(12-month period, as of April 30, 2019)

Endeavors of fixed duration; total = 3,750		
Includes 2,000 race relations endeavors in these categories:		
Expansion and consolidation	478	
Social action	935	
Social discourse	587	

Sustained endeavors by category; total = 194		
Agriculture	31	
Arts	4	
Economic development	13	
Education	68	
Environment	9	
Health	35	
Radio/TV	9	
Social action	25	

Source: Five Year Plan Progress Form C, as of April 30, 2019 reporting cycle

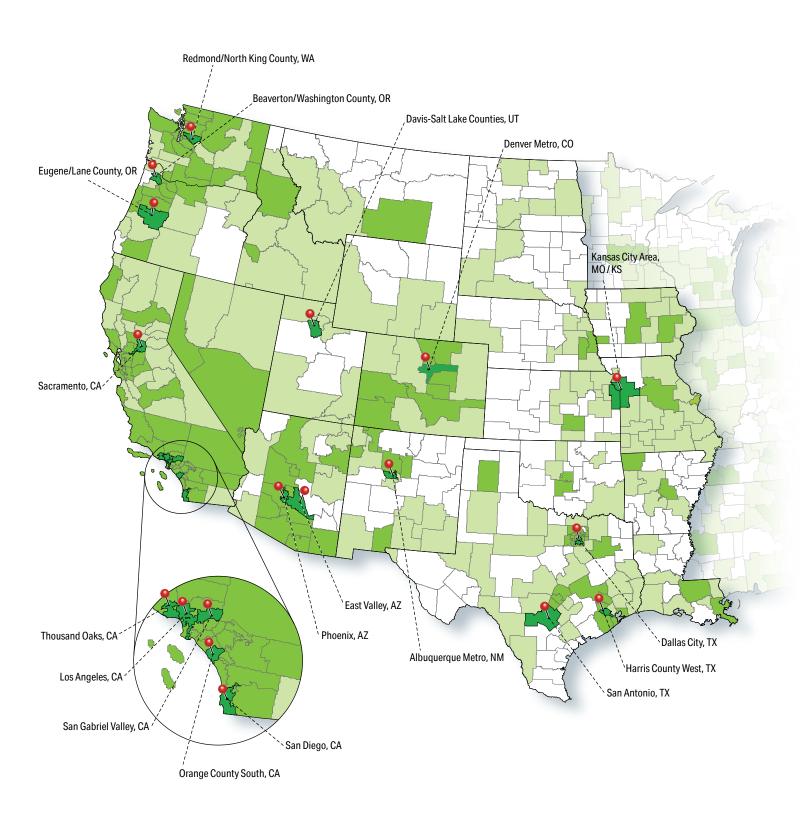
Homefront pioneers

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019

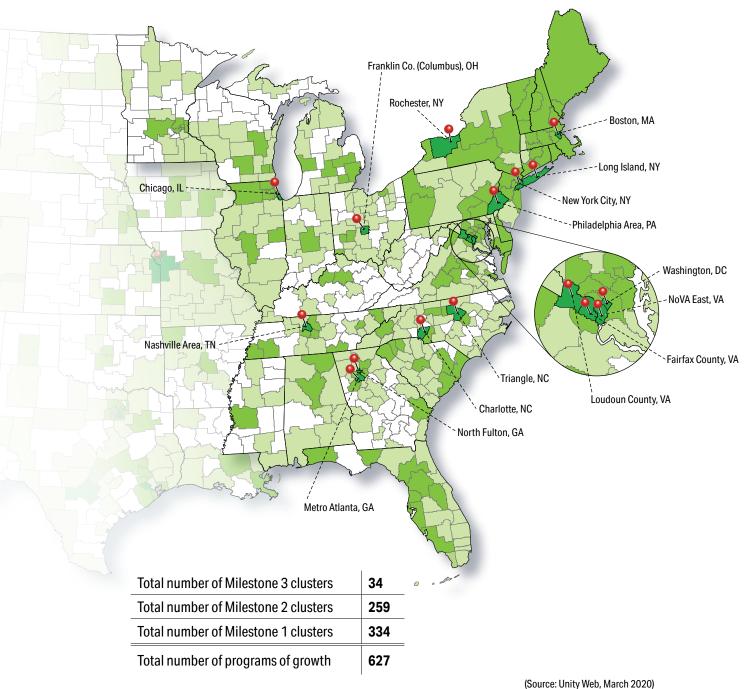


See the Regional Bahá'í Council reports for region-by-region numbers.

Programs of growth



- Milestone 1 has been passed cluster has a program of growth
- Milestone 2 has been passed cluster has an intensive program of growth
- Milestone 3 has been passed the pattern of activity embraces large numbers





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Regional Bahá'í Council of the

Appalachian States

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Advancements in programs of growth

he year 2019–20 saw programs of growth in five clusters in this region pass significant milestones: four achieved the second milestone, and one advanced past the third, the first in the region to do so. Increased core activities in focus neighborhoods and the mobilization of friends across clusters to host devotionals have driven growth. Devotionals often begin with families who open their homes to friends, co-workers, and acquaintances for prayers and spiritual conversations.

Recently established institute houses, which provide consistent locations for activities, also serve as key resources in focus neighborhoods. For example, in a neighborhood that had one active junior youth group, a team secured a property in 2019 after about a year's search. Activities in the neighborhood increased almost immediately, and now residents are

supporting a children's class, youth gatherings, and a neighborhood devotional.

Strength of institute training

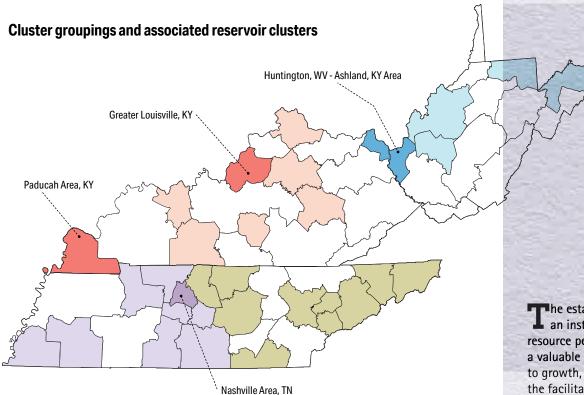
Four focus neighborhoods have seen youth mobilized through a process that begins with conversations, then advances through institute training and accompaniment in the field of service. The establishment of an institute growth resource person has been a valuable contribution to growth, particularly in the facilitation of regular intensive institute youth training camps. Activities that further built capacity were a regional reflection gathering for animators and a Ruhi Book 1 tutor refresher course. A number of youth in each neighborhood are now at the forefront of community building, arising as protagonists in the work and becoming part of the expanding nucleus of each neighborhood team.

REGIONAL BAHÁ'Í COUNCILS

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Participation in core activities

A strategy developed at an inter-institutional gathering in January 2019—at which Area Teaching Committees and devotional teams, supported by the Regional Council, launched a campaign to hold more devotionals—resulted in increased participation in this core activity across the region. This, in turn, led to greater numbers of people entering the institute process.

The cluster that passed the third milestone exemplifies this strategy, achieving its growth predominantly through the mobilization of a large number of friends from the Lur Persian ethnic minority who were previously unengaged in community building. With key Persian believers appointed to the Area Teaching Committee, the committee and devotional teams engaged these friends in the work of the Plan through home visits, encouragement to host devotional meetings, and formation of study circles. The cluster has seen a marked increase in unity between the Lur group and other Persian friends, overcoming historic antipathy as they worked side by side on teams engaging in core activities.

In another cluster working at the second milestone, the nucleus of friends in a focus neighborhood expanded from three members to five. An Area Teaching Committee was appointed, as increased participation in core activities created the need for a higher scheme of coordination.

Deployment of homefront pioneers

As in the previous three years of the Five Year Plan, raising homefront pioneers, while a critical need for the region, continues to challenge the Regional Council. However, one family offered two months' dedicated service in 2019 in a focus neighborhood. This limited but fruitful effort led to increased numbers of home visits, neighborhood devotionals, and youth gatherings, and contributed to the overall quality of engagement by residents in the community-building work.

The establishment of an institute growth resource person has been a valuable contribution to growth, particularly in the facilitation of regular intensive institute youth training camps. A number of youth in each neighborhood are now at the forefront of community building, arising as protagonists in the work and becoming part of the expanding nucleus of each neighborhood team.

he campaign to mobilize friends to host devotional gatherings has stimulated a commensurate increase in the quality of the region's devotional character and unity. In one neighborhood, continued growth, led by an expanding nucleus and assisted by shortterm pioneers, resulted in increased regular home visits and nine additional devotional gatherings in the homes of residents.



Mobilization of youth

A rhythm of quarterly intensive youth training camps, initiated in 2018, became well established in 2019. The friends held five regional or local youth camps during the year. A key learning has been that youth need swift accompaniment into the field of service following intensive periods of study. As one result, increasing numbers of youth are serving as teachers, animators, and tutors. In one focus neighborhood, seven resident youths are taking ownership of community-building work and attracting other youths to neighborhood activities. One youth serving as a children's class teacher and animator stated that it was in community building with local Bahá'í friends that she had most learned about character development and spiritual purpose.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

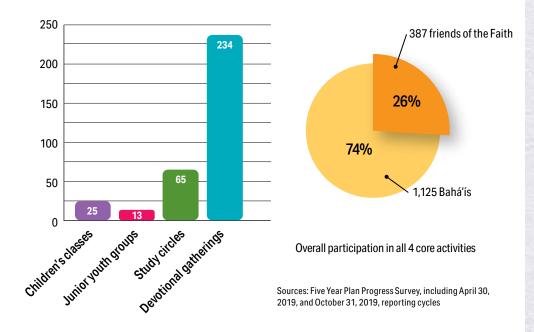
The campaign to mobilize friends to host devotional gatherings has stimulated a commensurate increase in the quality of the region's devotional character and unity. In one neighborhood, continued growth, led by an expanding nucleus and assisted by short-term pioneers, resulted in increased regular home visits and nine additional devotional

gatherings in the homes of residents. The work in the neighborhood has also resulted in two small social action initiatives.

Additional comments

One cluster's collective teaching campaign employing social media outreach continued to attract visitors from the larger community to occasions for meaningful conversation. To date, 1,327 people have interacted at some level, with 244 participating in at least one conversation and 40 participating more than once. As the friends gain experience, the capacity of team members to use social media to build personal connections has increased, key factors being regular weekly reflection and the continuing training of team members.

337 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019

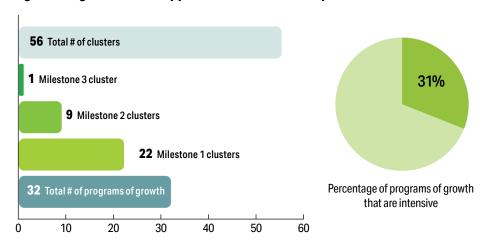


Homefront pioneers

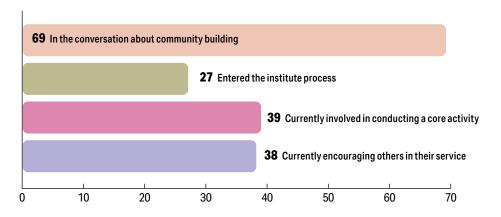
Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the Appalachian States as of April 1, 2020

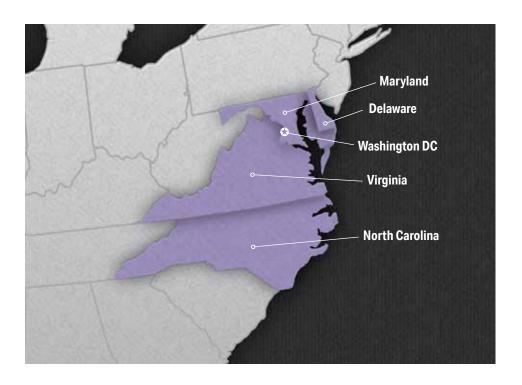


Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Regional Bahá'í Council of the **Atlantic States**

The growth in capacity of the Regional Training Institute—and in participation in the institute process—has reached a point where a permanent facility is necessary for its continued progress. To this aim, a process has been launched to identify the first of two possible regional properties.



Advancements in programs of growth and deployment of homefront pioneers

he Atlantic States region has witnessed many wonderful advances during 2019–20, built on the strengthening capacities of the friends. Consultations on the "expanding nucleus" are more prevalent than ever.

Ten clusters advanced past the second milestone of growth this year, with three others passing the third. Several that attained the second milestone were buttressed by teams of short-term pioneer youth deployed last summer and earlier. For advanced clusters as well as those across the continuum, learning to tap into the power of the generality of believers has been an energizing focus, even as the pattern of growth within neighborhoods continues to intensify.

Strength of institute training and mobilization of youth

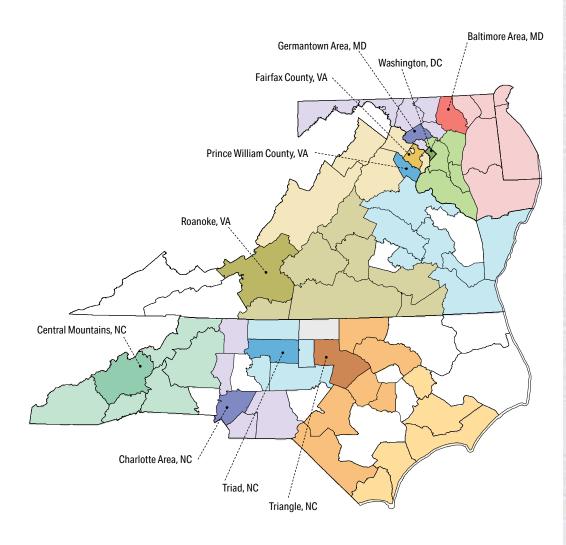
Advancement in the upper-level institute courses is growing steadily, complemented by the inflow of new participants in the sequence. The majority of institute courses completed in recent cycles are connected to a continuing series of youth campaigns, 40 of which occurred this past year. This has brought in new resources and led to several friends declaring their belief in Bahá'u'lláh.

The growth in capacity of the Regional Training Institute (RTI)—and in participation in the institute process—has reached a point where a permanent facility is necessary for its continued progress. To this aim, a process has been launched to identify the first of two possible regional properties.

Participation in core activities

Core activities have grown by more than 60 percent, having surpassed 2,000 in

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



The Council is setting its sights on reaching the mark of 1,000 participants each in children's classes and junior youth groups. The region is steadily progressing toward its goal of sustaining 1,500 devotionals, building on the success of a regionwide devotional campaign.

recent months. More than 900 additional participants have been mobilized, up from 600 last year. Participation in activities is approaching 10,000, 40 percent of them friends of the Faith. The Council is setting its sights on reaching the mark of 1,000 participants each in children's classes and junior youth groups.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

The region is steadily progressing toward its goal of sustaining 1,500 devotionals, building on the success of a region-wide devotional campaign. Through the growing collaboration of cluster agencies and Local Spiritual Assemblies, focus is being maintained on approaching this endeavor from the perspective of capacity building.

The Council also observed a notable surge in Assembly contributions to the regional Fund this year, making it more possible to furnish material support to efforts across the region.

Mobilization of "learning teams"

Together with the Counselor and Auxiliary Board members attending to this region, the Atlantic Council and the RTI Board have maintained focus this year on refining various systems and processes necessary for growth, as well as on nurturing wider ownership and capacity to think and act in their light. Efforts to systematize learning have led to the mobilization of "learning teams" for nearly all major processes in the region, including those dedicated to the emergence and development of

Although various learning processes are at different stages of development, their combined effect produces a diverse array of learning spaces throughout the year, allowing insights to flow more fluidly from the grass roots to the regional-level institutions and, finally, back to the grass roots.



Area Teaching Committees, the flow of information and vital statistics, the settlement of homefront pioneers, seeker response, and others.

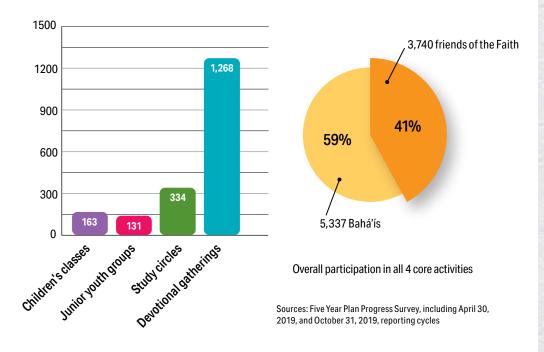
While striving to be rooted in the appropriate guidance, each learning team focuses on nurturing its process over time and on following certain questions (or objects of learning) and the associated capacities needed to advance them. Each team is also working to strengthen its rhythm of action and reflection while collaborating closely with others at the frontiers of its process. Although various learning processes are at different stages of development, their combined effect produces a diverse array of learning spaces throughout the year, allowing insights to flow more fluidly from the grass roots to the regional-level institutions and, finally, back to the grass roots.

Not only is this "learning through teams" approach enhancing institutional capacity to follow developments and furnish support where needed, it also weaves naturally into the region-wide rhythm of learning, which draws both from the experience accumulating at the grass roots and the advances being made across the continent.

A twice-yearly cycle of learning has been developed, with each cycle beginning soon after the semiannual plenary of the Continental Board of Counselors. The Counselor meets with the Council and the RTI Board to examine the latest learning from around the world, reflect on the health of certain processes, and identify current questions and themes to pursue in the region. Straight away, these themes are taken up at an inter-institutional meeting (IIM), where insights generated at the regional or subregional levels can be contributed and rich experience shared. Plans are then made to facilitate the further advance of clusters and groups, and as these are implemented, themes and insights from the IIM are naturally disseminated to the grass roots. Over time, this pattern reinforces unity of thought among the institutions and enhances the friends' collective ability to describe the region's unfolding narrative and to collaborate at higher levels.

Undoubtedly, there is still a great distance more to travel, but each step will carry the region forward in the same way that prior steps have—always from strength to strength—toward the goal of advancing the process of entry by troops.

1,896 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019

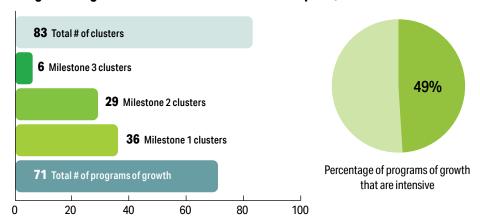


Homefront pioneers

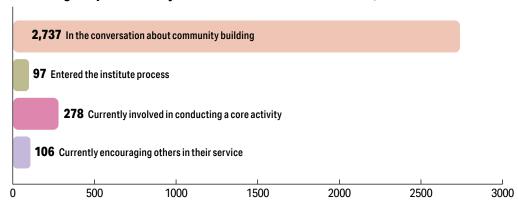
Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the Atlantic States as of April 1, 2020



Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Regional Bahá'í Council of the

State of California

nine regional teaching conferences, held over three weekends in May and June, brought together just under 3,000 believers and friends of the Faith. Together they explored how to multiply regular devotionals, which strengthen the spiritual foundations of their communities, and celebrated the victories of the first three years of the Plan.



Advancements in programs of growth

s the tempo of activities intensified during 2019-20, two additional clusters-Sacramento and San Gabriel Valley—reached the third milestone on the continuum of growth with more than 100 core activities each, bringing the number of third-milestone clusters in California to six. Among these, San Diego and Los Angeles passed the 200-core-activities mark this year. Meanwhile, the Bakersfield cluster advanced to the second milestone, and the current goal is the advancement of 14 additional clusters past the second milestone. To that end, the region has adopted a unified vision and plan for the remaining cycles of this Five Year Plan in accordance with the highly inspirational and clear guidance expressed at a gathering held by the Continental Board of Counselors.

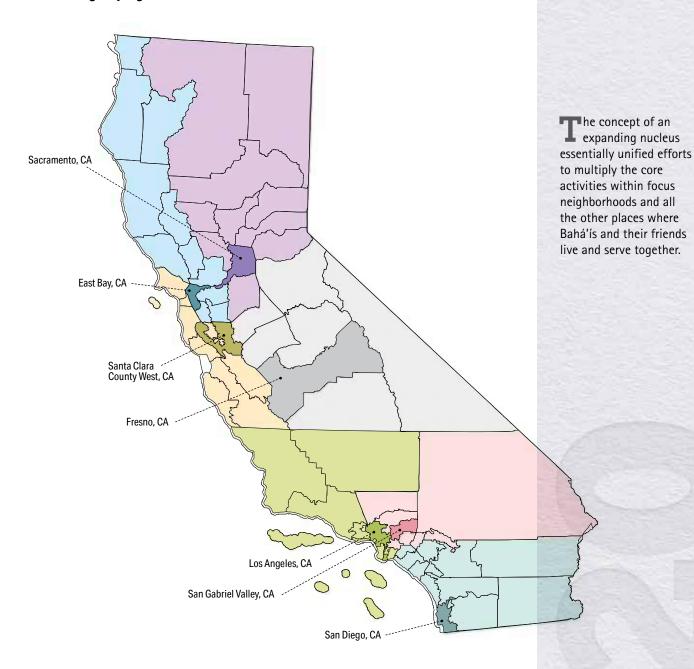
Strength of institute training

As the learning site in San Diego focuses on embracing a significant portion of all junior youth in the Linda Vista neighborhood, the lessons learned there are valuable for the further advancement of the program by the California Regional Training Institute. Regular reflection gatherings for coordinators were focused on expanding the number of youth from the larger community who are in the institute. This robust learning process, featuring systematic consultation with Auxiliary Board members, has been adopted for other regional gatherings.

Participation in core activities

The administrative year started with nine regional teaching conferences held over three weekends in May and June, with just under 3,000 believers and friends of the Faith participating. Together they explored how to multiply regular devotionals, which strengthen the spiritual

Cluster groupings and associated reservoir clusters



foundations of their communities, and celebrated the victories of the first three years of the Plan. An exciting element of the conferences was the exploration of the concept of an expanding nucleus, essentially "a growing band of believers who can maintain, with those around them, a sustained focus on nurturing growth and building capacity, and who are distinguished by their ability and their discipline to reflect on action and learn from experience." This concept essentially unified efforts to multiply the core activities within focus neigh-

borhoods and all the other places where Bahá'ís and their friends live and serve together.

The Regional Council was more than delighted to see that nearly every teaching conference included a period of learning in action, in which participants ventured out to teach and to acquire knowledge about direct methods of sharing the Faith with others and inviting them to various activities. These encounters were too many to count.

The number of youth from the larger community in receptive neighborhoods who have entered the institute has risen steadily, benefiting not only those who have newly found the Faith, but also junior youth from the larger society who have completed their program of spiritual empowerment.



Deployment of homefront pioneers

One of the most fruitful results this year has been the movement of friends to homefront goal clusters. Over 40 heroic believers have arisen to respond to this call and have moved to designated clusters. As a result of these efforts, several clusters have made advancements in their development.

Mobilization of youth

During the summer, California's youth increased their dedicated activities and services. Across the region, 23 institute camps were held during summer. At one of these, some 30 youths studied for five weeks and completed five institute courses. Such intensive periods of study, combined with days of action and service in nearby clusters, have prepared and inspired these young people for lifelong service. It is gratifying to note that some are from families that are learning about the Faith, which increases appreciation of the value of training institute courses and the opportunity to serve their communities.

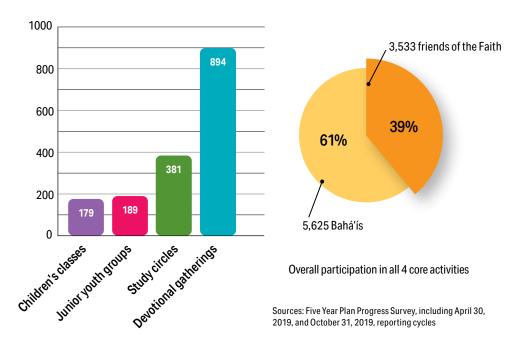
The number of youth from the larger community in receptive neighborhoods who have entered the institute has risen steadily, benefiting not only those who have newly found the Faith, but also junior youth from the larger society who have completed their program of spiritual empowerment. Many, having reached or passed the age of 15, are

entering the sequence of institute courses. The friendships generated among these youth and their tutors reached new heights, and two such groups made visits to the House of Worship in Illinois. One group traveled in a convoy of cars from San Diego to Wilmette, stopping along the way to visit youth in receptive neighborhoods in such places as the Navajo Nation and the state of Kansas.

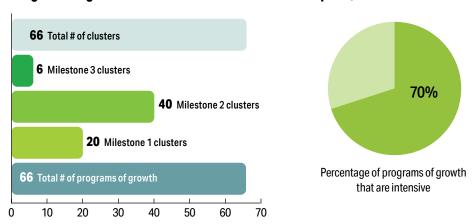
Quality of community life and its devotional character

Celebrations of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb provided a wonderful opportunity for the friends everywhere to improve the quality of their communities and enhance the devotional character of their gatherings. One factor distinguishing these celebrations from those just two years ago was the number of individuals, teams, and families who took the ownership and initiative to arrange celebrations with their own networks of acquaintances. Reports indicate that some 417 such celebrations attracted well over 15,000 souls, with over 4,000 friends of the Faith. During celebrations in 124 locations, some 5,700 people watched the film Dawn of the Light. Members of the Regional Council bow their heads in gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh for having enabled the believers in California to arise with such joy and enthusiasm, and on such a large scale.

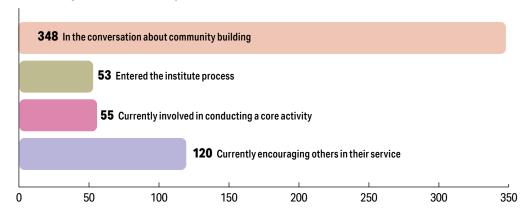
1,643 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the State of California as of April 1, 2020



Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Regional Bahá'í Council – State of California

Homefront pioneers

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Regional Bahá'í Council of the

Four Corners States

The region has almost doubled the number of nuclei to over 90, working across 41 clusters. It has become clear that to develop this pattern of growth and increase the number of friends dedicated to the transformation of society, it is essential that the Council see all as protagonists in community building, beginning with initial conversations.



Advancements in programs of growth

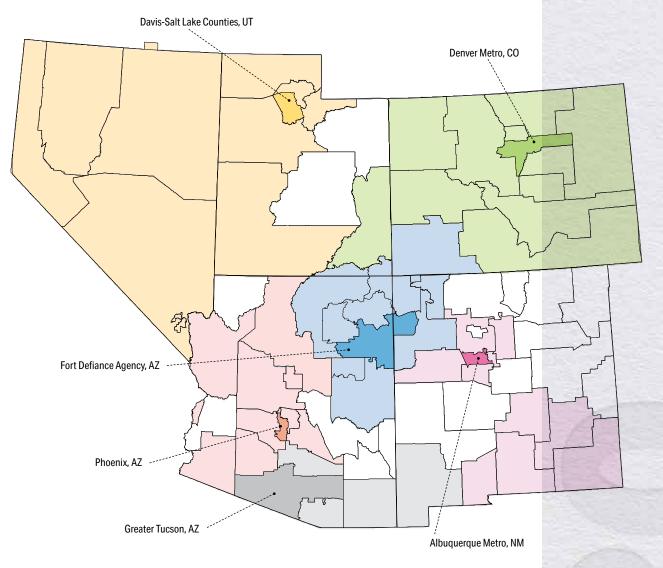
lusters in this region have advanced during 2019–20 through increased participation in devotional gatherings, the expansion of nuclei of friends, collaboration between institutions and agencies, and the dedicated efforts of 65 homefront pioneers.

Both the Council and the Regional Training Institute have worked closely with Auxiliary Board members and a member of the Continental Board of Counselors to strengthen the idea of the "expanding nucleus" throughout the region. The region has almost doubled the number of nuclei to over 90, working across 41 clusters. It has become clear that to develop this pattern of growth and increase the number of friends dedicated to the transformation of society, it is essential that the Council see all as protagonists in community building,

beginning with initial conversations. As each nucleus expands, the cluster feels the intensity of teaching work increase through greater participation in core activities.

Strength of institute training and mobilization of youth

The Four Corners Regional Training Institute continues to think more systematically about the development of youth and junior youth. Friends from various clusters who have experience in these areas come together several times a year to study quidance, reflect on experience, and clarify vision around the importance of raising tutors who, in turn, work closely with cohorts of youth and raise them up as animators. They also reflect on ways to strengthen junior youth programs. This knowledge is then shared with other clusters through gatherings at each of the region's six reservoir clusters. In the past year, the number of youths participating in the institute has dou-



bled. Meanwhile, an increasing number of junior youth groups comprise some 600 participants. In many neighborhoods, youth who have graduated from the junior youth program or have completed the main course sequence are key protagonists in the growth of their own neighborhoods.

Participation in core activities

The region has seen an increase in the number of families engaged through activities such as children's classes, study circles, devotional gatherings, Holy Days, and family gatherings. As friends learn to work in smaller pockets within a population, they begin to nurture groups of families through the educational and community-building processes. Further,

during the Five Year Plan the region has seen rising numbers of parents and grandparents involved in their children's spiritual education, with some arising to serve as activity facilitators who reach out to their friends, families, and neighbors.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

In both the Davis-Salt Lake Counties cluster in Utah and the Albuquerque Metro cluster in New Mexico, the Area Teaching Committees, Local Spiritual Assemblies, and Auxiliary Board members are united in efforts to inspire the friends to enhance the devotional character of their lives in accompaniment with families, friends, and co-workers.

Plan the region has seen rising numbers of parents and grandparents involved in their children's spiritual education, with some arising to serve as activity facilitators who reach out to their friends, families, and neighbors.

Proving beyond the idea that the Area Teaching Committee is the primary protagonist in a cluster's movement, friends in the region realized that each Assembly plays a major role in the movement of not only its own community but also its cluster. This has created a strong desire for each individual and community to play a role in the growth of the cluster as well.



Within two months this year, each cluster saw devotional participants increase by over 100. Moving beyond the idea that the Area Teaching Committee is the primary protagonist in a cluster's movement, friends in the region realized that each Assembly plays a major role in the movement of not only its own community but also its cluster. This has created a strong desire for each individual and community to play a role in the growth of the cluster as well.

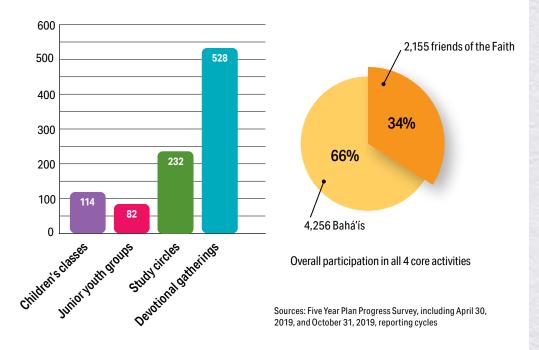
During 2019–20, the number of devotionals in the region doubled. In preparation for the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, many friends used devotionals to deepen understanding of the occasion's sacredness. As a result, some friends were inspired to attend a celebration and others were empowered to host their own gatherings. In the time since those festivities, a number of those who attended, wishing to continue their spiritual journeys, have begun to attend devotionals regularly.

Coherence of spiritual and material progress in neighborhoods

The region is paying particular attention to three neighborhoods in Arizona where the institute process is empowering populations to take ownership of their development. In the Creighton neighborhood in Phoenix, family members serve as growth-process protago-

nists, realizing the ways their involvement leads to the well being of their entire family. Through deep reflection on the concepts found in the institute courses, the nucleus addresses social and material challenges that youth face, and builds on institute skills to take modest steps toward improved material conditions. In Phoenix's Sunnyslope neighborhood, the movement of youth in the institute has recently made rapid progress. The team working with cohorts of youth uses home visits, with conversations on themes of coherence between the material and spiritual dimensions, to enable young people and families to commit their energies to service. Meanwhile, the Chaparral neighborhood in the East Valley cluster has a well-established process of youth finishing the junior youth program and committing to serving children and junior youth. The young people who call this neighborhood home look upon the institute process as a means for addressing negative forces. They consult on the nature of progress and develop capacities within the community.

956 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019

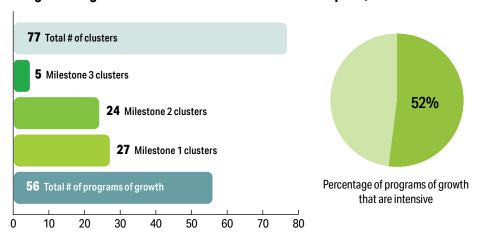


Homefront pioneers

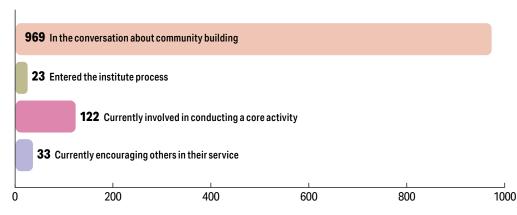
Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the Four Corners States as of April 1, 2020



Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Heartland States

pata from across the region shows a 36 percent increase in youth in institute activities since September 2019, with a 200 percent rise since the effort to engage youth began two years ago. There was also an 80 percent increase in junior youth engaged in the program since September 2019, up 35 percent from two years ago.



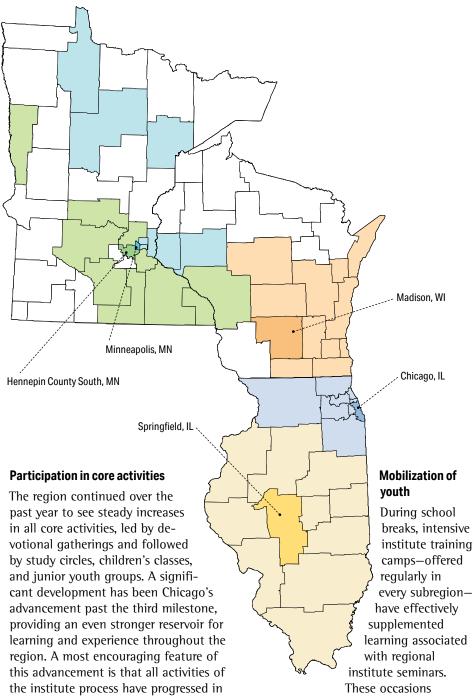
Advancements in programs of growth

uring 2019-20, Chicago became the region's first cluster to establish the junior youth spiritual empowerment program as described in the guidance of the International Teaching Center, having engaged over 50 youths in 11 junior youth groups. Another of the year's major developments was the advancement of the Willmar, Minnesota, cluster from the first to beyond the second milestone. The progress in Willmar has provided a pattern for learning for similar first-milestone clusters striving to advance during the final year of the Five Year Plan.

Strength of institute training

The institute process has continued to strengthen primarily through regular regional institute seminars. Over the past two years, they have taken place approximately every six months, and each has engaged an average of 40 friends from 12 clusters across the region. Their focus is on two primary objects of learning: the ways conversations can attract and engage youth in the institute process, and how the junior youth spiritual empowerment program can be strengthened through systematic efforts by teams of friends in a wide variety of clusters and neighborhoods.

Data from across the region shows a 36 percent increase in youth in institute activities since September 2019, with a 200 percent rise since the effort to engage youth began two years ago. There was also an 80 percent increase in junior youth engaged in the program since September 2019, up 35 percent from two years ago. This significant progress sets the stage for further expansion of this strategy in all subregions during the Plan's last few cycles.



Deployment of homefront pioneers

breadth of learning.

While the number of homefront pioneers has not increased during the past year, learning has continued around effectively deploying and supporting the work of these dedicated friends—especially those from the ranks of youth.

a manner that indicates both depth and

have proved to be highly effective in helping youth advance their study and commitment to service. The Council is closely following lessons the friends are learning about how the youth can continue their study effectively and how they can be accompanied to arise and serve following their camp experiences. Such camps also became available to junior youth during the past year.

significant
development has been
Chicago's advancement
past the third milestone,
providing an even stronger
reservoir for learning and
experience throughout the
region. A most encouraging
feature of this advancement
is that all activities of
the institute process have
progressed in a manner
that indicates both depth
and breadth of learning.

Regular communication and collaboration between several Local Spiritual Assemblies and Area Teaching Committees in the region has advanced significantly over the past year. The Council looks forward to accelerated collaboration in the final year of the Plan as it strives to assist many more clusters in their efforts to advance their programs of growth to the next milestone.



A significant contribution to the engagement of youth across the region and beyond was the hosting in November of a youth gathering in conjunction with the observance of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb at the Mother Temple of the West. Attended by 100 youths from several regions, this event inspired many to see themselves on a path of service as they gathered in prayer and song in commemoration of the Twin Holy Birthdays. Four youths attending from the Heartland region formally declared their belief in Bahá'u'lláh as the gathering ended.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

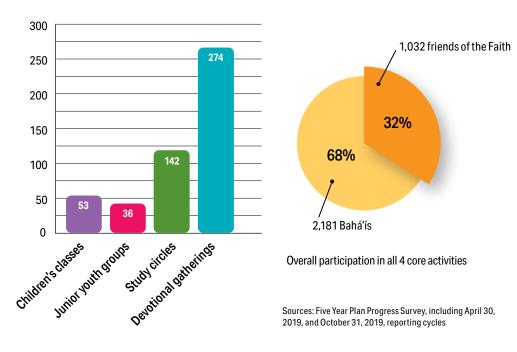
An increased quality in community life throughout the region was demonstrated in the proliferation of devotional gatherings, the variety and richness of Holy Day observances inspired by the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, and growing attendance at Bahá'í schools in every subregion. All of these attracted the wide interest and active participation of a growing number of friends of the Faith. The increasing frequency of both local and regional events and activities at the Mother Temple is also having a profound effect, as Bahá'ís and their friends experience the connections between worship and service.

Additional comments

While still in an early stage of development, regular communication and collaboration between several Local Spiritual Assemblies and Area Teaching Committees in the region has advanced significantly over the past year. The Council looks forward to accelerated collaboration in the final year of the Plan as it strives to assist many more clusters in their efforts to advance their programs of growth to the next milestone.

Another promising development has been the implementation of the online version of the Statistical Reporting Program (SRP) this past fall. Since that time, the Regional Council has noted steady improvements in agency and institution collaboration in clusters, the number of clusters reporting, timeliness and completeness of data updates, and expanded use of SRP capabilities. As the volume and complexity of activity across the region rises, SRP will become an increasingly useful tool supporting collaboration in growth.

505 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019

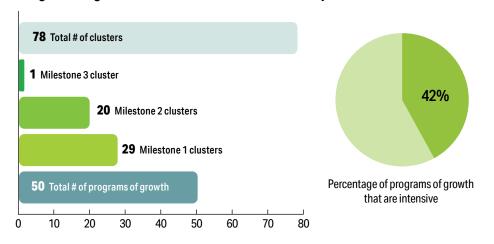


Homefront pioneers

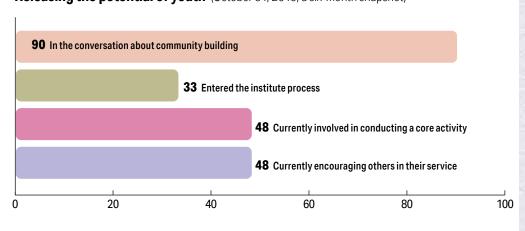
Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the Heartland States as of April 1, 2020



Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Midwestern States

The region now has teams of people in 11 neighborhoods, each focused on inviting, training, and accompanying youth into service. This has led to 47 percent growth in the number of junior youth groups, with the number of young people involved approaching 300.



Advancements in programs of growth

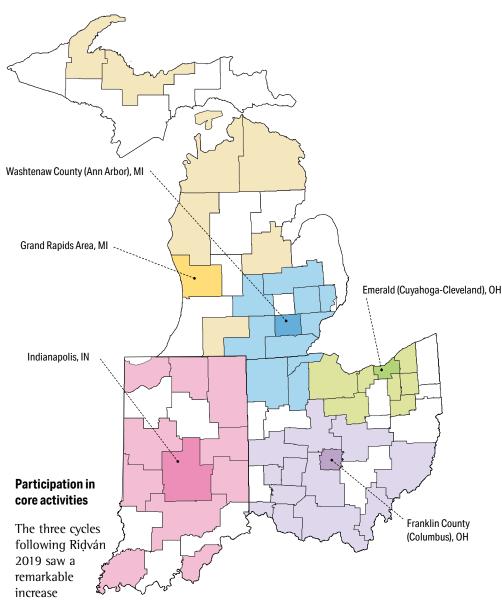
he Midwestern region celebrated a significant victory during 2019–20, as the Franklin County (Columbus) cluster in Ohio reached the third milestone on the continuum of growth—the first cluster in the region to do so. This achievement was made possible through the combined endeavors of the Area Teaching Committee, the Spiritual Assembly of Columbus, the institute coordinators, and members of the Auxiliary Boards. These institutions collaborated in a cluster-wide effort to connect with the generality of believers and to encourage them to begin new devotional gatherings, bringing the spirit of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to scores of households.

Strength of institute training and mobilization of youth

Underlying these efforts has been a

Regional Training Institute gaining in strength, especially in the mobilization of youth. The region now has teams of people in 11 neighborhoods, each focused on inviting, training, and accompanying youth into service. This has led to 47 percent growth in the number of junior youth groups, with the number of young people involved approaching 300. Friends of the Faith participating rose by 49 percent and now exceed four-fifths of those taking part. This expansion has been made possible by an increase in regular intensive youth training courses, scheduled for school breaks and attended primarily by neighborhood youth.

Two clusters in the region—Grand Rapids Area in Michigan and Franklin County (Columbus)—are blazing the trail of accompanying cohorts of neighborhood youth into service as they advance through intensive institute courses in every cycle.



in core activities. Most notable is the 64 percent increase in the number of devotional meetings, now approaching 300. The overall number of core activities increased by a promising 45 percent to nearly 500. Participation by friends of the Faith increased by 25 percent.

Based on analysis of the region's progress, the Council has set a goal of increasing the number of core activities to 1,000 and more than quadrupling the number of participants to 10,000 by Riḍván 2021. To achieve these objectives, it will be necessary to advance 31 additional clusters to the second milestone and four additional clusters to the third.

Deployment of homefront pioneers

Since Ridván 2019, more than a dozen homefront pioneers have settled in the region, bringing the total to 47 during this Plan. Twenty-six of these devoted friends were among the 75 people who in February attended the region's first pioneering conference, organized to support existing pioneers and to recruit new ones. Notably, the two clusters that advanced past the second and third milestones this year were aided by more than 20 pioneers: 12 in the Davison-Flint cluster in Michigan and nine in Franklin County (Columbus). The conference emphasized the importance of pioneers working to expand the nucleus of friends

wenty-six of the region's homefront pioneers were among the 75 people who in February attended the region's first pioneering conference, organized to support existing pioneers and to recruit new ones. Notably. the two clusters that advanced past the second and third milestones this year were aided by more than 20 pioneers: 12 in the Davison-Flint cluster in Michigan and nine in Franklin County (Columbus). uch of the growth in focus neighborhoods has developed from the receptivity of African immigrants. To support community building with this population, a special Council-appointed work group assisted with planning the first African Community Building Conference.



serving as collaborators in each of the goal clusters.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

A rise in devotional gatherings was evident throughout the region, no doubt attributable to a widespread focus on mobilizing believers to host devotional meetings in their homes. The united efforts of Area Teaching Committees (ATCs), Local Spiritual Assemblies, and members of the Auxiliary Boards were instrumental in supporting this growth. A total of six Assembly gatherings and teaching conferences were held in Indianapolis, Indiana; Akron, Columbus, and Kettering, Ohio; and Grand Rapids and Washtenaw County, Michigan. These uplifting gatherings led to a record number of new devotional meetings, where souls inhale the sweet fragrances of the Abhá Beauty.

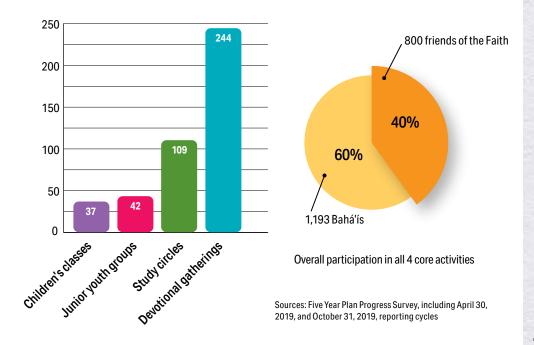
Another key to the increase in devotional meetings has been the development of a learning process around the work of Area Teaching Committees. During the past year, the Council continued its effort to accompany ATCs in the study of Ruhi Book 10.3, *The Dynamics of Service on an Area Teaching Committee*. The Council also began holding regular meetings focused on systematic learning with the ATCs of

the five reservoir clusters. These ATCs concentrated on increasing the number and quality of devotionals by enlisting helpers to accompany devotional hosts. These meetings have also included neighborhood outreach, helping ATCs gain experience in planning neighborhood campaigns.

African immigrant populations

Much of the growth in focus neighborhoods has developed from the receptivity of African immigrants. To support community building with this population, a special Council-appointed work group assisted with planning the first African Community Building Conference, sponsored by the National Spiritual Assembly and attended by more than 120 Africans living in three US regions, including 45 friends of the Faith. Six equatorial African countries were represented, from Liberia on the Atlantic coast to Tanzania on the Indian Ocean. Most of the conference was conducted in Swahili and English, with translations available in Kinyarwanda and French.

432 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019

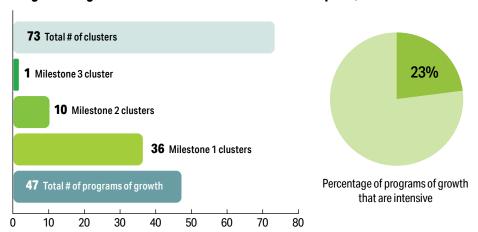


Homefront pioneers

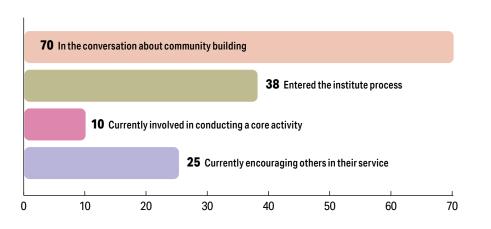
Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the Midwestern States as of April 1, 2020

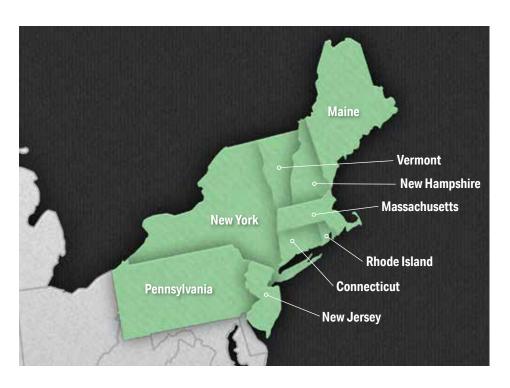


Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Northeastern States

Strategies to advance eight additional clusters past the second milestone have been strengthened through the untiring efforts of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, visits by Regional Council members, the deployment of teams of mobile resources from reservoir clusters, and increasing unity of vision and action by friends in the communities.



enefiting from the special potency surrounding the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb and the unity of purpose in working together to win a common goal, the Northeastern region experienced significant progress in advancing the objectives of the Five Year Plan.

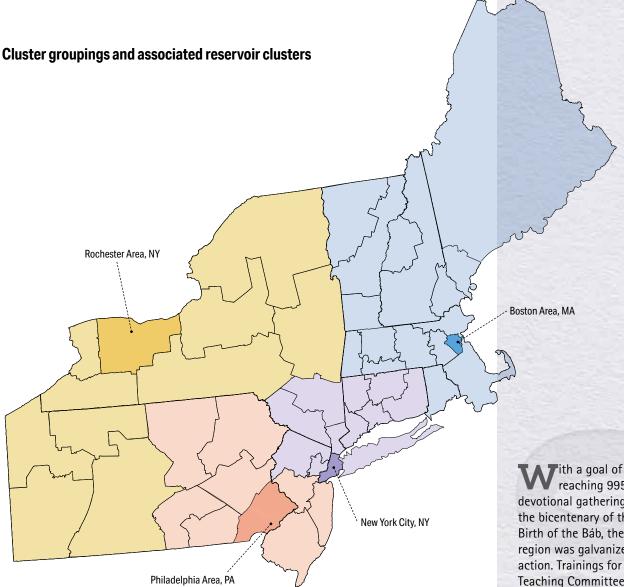
Advancements in programs of growth

During 2019–20, all 47 clusters in the Northeast strove to advance along the continuum of growth. At present, five of 13 clusters slated to move past the second milestone within this Plan have accomplished their goal. Strategies to advance the remaining eight, some of which are rapidly approaching the second milestone, have been strengthened through the untiring efforts of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, visits by Regional Council members, the deployment of teams of mobile resources from reservoir clusters, and increasing unity of vision and action by friends

in the communities. In addition, the Council was overjoyed to acknowledge that three more clusters passed the third milestone this past year, bringing the current total to five in the region. It is anticipated that, very soon, two more will advance.

Strength of institute training

With the Regional Training Institute focused on learning to engage youth from the larger community in the sequence of courses while accompanying them in service, the quality of the institute process is advancing. A systematic approach to setting goals, providing regular occasions for reflection and assessing growth, is helping to solidify the progress being made. The continuing use of institute camps—and the experience and learning that result—enables increasingly effective training of cohorts of youth in the region. "Strengthening the Institute" gatherings held on a regional level then extended in subsequent second-wave gatherings, along with institute seminars



taking place in reservoir clusters, are also contributing to advancement.

Participation in core activities

One of the outstanding highlights of the year was the Devotional Gathering Campaign, launched by the Council in collaboration with Auxiliary Board members and the Regional Training Institute. With a goal of reaching 995 devotional gatherings by the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, the whole region was galvanized for action. Trainings for Area Teaching Committees and statistics officers, teaching conferences for the generality of believers, and special gatherings for Spiritual Assemblies prepared everyone to participate in increasing the

number of devotions and seeing them as portals of growth to additional core activities. The result was a total of 1,009 devotional gatherings in time for the Twin Holy Birthdays—and more by the end of October—representing a more than 100 percent increase in less than a year. With great joy, the friends laid this victory at the feet of the blessed Báb in their celebration of the bicentenary of His Birth.

Deployment of homefront pioneers

In collaboration with the Regional Training Institute and homefront pioneering coordinator, the Council has continued efforts to systematize the recruitment, training, deployment, and support of

reaching 995 devotional gatherings by the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, the whole region was galvanized for action. Trainings for Area **Teaching Committees** and statistics officers, teaching conferences for the generality of believers, and special gatherings for Spiritual Assemblies prepared everyone to participate. The result was a total of 1,009 devotional gatherings in time for the Twin Holy Birthdays-and more by the end of October. while not as easily measured as the more quantitative goals, there is evidence of a growing spirit of loving unity and enthusiasm for service in the region. This was doubtless boosted by the Devotional Gathering Campaign, which focused as much on enriching the quality of devotionals as it did on multiplying their numbers.



homefront pioneers to first-milestone clusters and focus neighborhoods. At the same time, the region is learning to deploy teams of mobile tutors and other resources to assist the growth of clusters on a short-term basis. At present, more than 35 homefront pioneers are serving in the region's clusters and neighborhoods.

Mobilization of youth

The region has learned a great deal about effective training and mobilization of youth. The number of youth who move from being invited into the institute process to entering it, who complete the courses, and who then enter the field of service is increasing. Specific goals to multiply the number of junior youth groups and participants are also stimulating progress. A focus on the expansion of nuclei bolsters the effort to find more effective ways to accompany young people as they assume their roles as protagonists in the work of community building.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

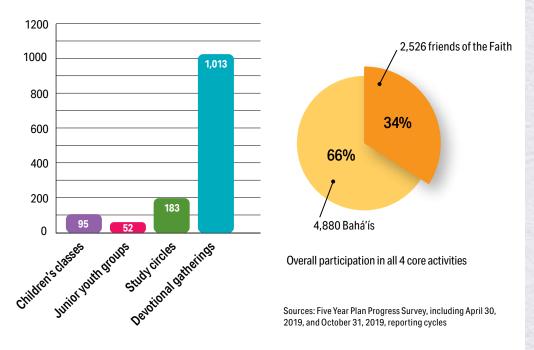
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cused as much on enriching the quality of devotionals as it did on multiplying their numbers.

Additional comments

A series of nine teaching conferences held within the region was instrumental in furthering the understanding of the believers about the elements of the Five Year Plan and precipitating the release of spiritual energy that propelled the friends forward in their efforts to advance the region. Central to that progress, too, was the unfailing guidance of the Counselor in consultation with this Council, as well as the dedicated service rendered by Spiritual Assemblies and other institutions and agencies upon which so much of the advancement depends. With the friends advancing their understanding of serving within an expanding nucleus where everyone has a part to play, the joy of even greater progress is assuredly in sight.

1,343 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019

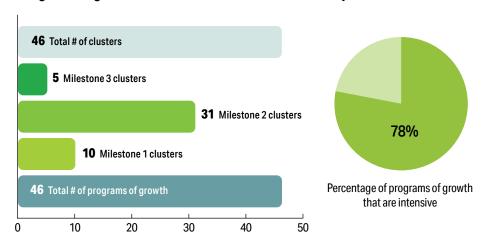


Homefront pioneers

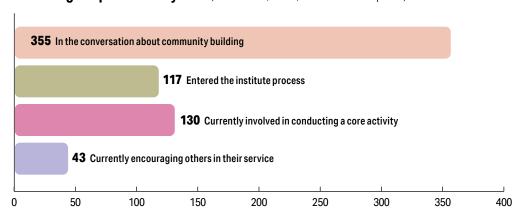
Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the Northeastern States as of April 1, 2020



Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Northern Plains States

The appointment of the Regional Training Institute Board, a regional institute coordinator, and a regional institute resource person provided new resources to strengthen the institute process.



his year the membership of the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Northern Plains States was adjusted to five, and three former members were appointed to a newly formed four-member Regional Training Institute (RTI) Board. These changes provide the Council and the Institute Board the opportunity to focus on different aspects of the Five Year Plan.

Advancements in programs of growth

During 2019–20, the number of clusters achieving the second milestone of growth doubled to four, and the region's most advanced cluster—Treasure Valley, ldaho—is advancing toward the third milestone.

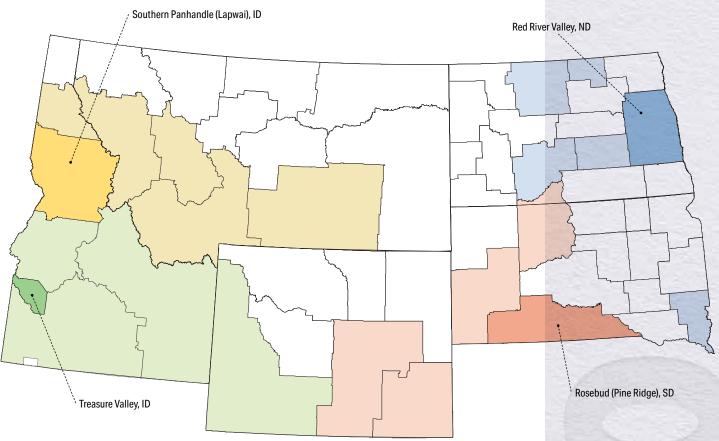
Strength of institute training

The appointment of the RTI Board, a regional institute coordinator, and a regional institute resource person provided new resources to strengthen the institute process.

The institute coordinator focuses on youth entering the institute and supports initiatives in the Dakotas and Montana. The coordinator and a friend from the Treasure Valley cluster attended a Ruhi Book 10 training in the Four Corners region, and the coordinator and an online tutor from South Dakota facilitated a study of Book 10.3 with the Treasure Valley Area Teaching Committee.

To become strong facilitators of Book 8, several people have been attending seminars in the Four Corners region. One Book 8 initiative in the Dakotas brought together several indigenous women for a weekend intensive, followed up with videoconferencing.

The regional institute resource person, meanwhile, has been accompanying many initiatives focused on improving the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. Regular animator trainings, youth institute campaigns, and outreach



initiatives to establish new junior youth groups are among the strategies.

Videoconferencing has provided opportunities for individuals and groups to participate in the institute process in this vast, largely rural region. One group primarily from North Dakota is studying Book 3, Grade 1. A tutor from Arizona visits frequently to accompany participants with their children's class. After a group in Montana studied Book 5, participants began animating two junior youth groups. Twice a year, they come together to hold a junior youth camp open to junior youth and youth throughout the state.

Participation in core activities

Core activity participation showed a marked increase, both by Bahá'ís and friends from the larger community. The

Missoula County-Flathead Reservation cluster in Montana passed the second milestone because of a focus on neighborhood activities in Missoula. For over a year, one person developed relationships with neighborhood families; this year, she started a junior youth group and a neighborhood children's class. This was a big change for the community, as its children's class was previously primarily for Bahá'í children and held in a central location.

Deployment of homefront pioneers

Homefront pioneers are very limited in the Northern Plains, but two sets of couples from outside the region have brought a strong understanding of the institute process. In Wyoming, the presence of pioneers has invigorated two communities. In one, pioneers, within months of arriving, established

ideoconferencing has provided opportunities for individuals and groups to participate in the institute process in this vast, largely rural region. One group primarily from North Dakota is studying Book 3, Grade 1. A tutor from Arizona visits frequently to accompany participants with their children's class. After a group in Montana studied Book 5, participants began animating two junior youth groups.

Since the rollout of the online Statistical Report Program, visits to communities and tutors have strengthened understanding of the importance of the flow of information. Realization is growing that the information gathered is less about numbers and more about the progress of the community in bringing people closer to Bahá'u'lláh.



all community-building activities with participants from the larger community.

Mobilization of youth

Participation in animator gatherings led to the organization of youth intensive institute camps. Immediately afterward, junior youth camps were held to provide opportunities for the youths to use their newly developed skills. This past summer, meanwhile, several Treasure Valley cluster youths committed to a summer of service, participating in institute study and assisting junior youth groups and camps.

There are now four period-of-service youths in the Treasure Valley cluster. One began a children's class in the Brentwood neighborhood for the younger siblings of its junior youth group participants. A mother in the same neighborhood is accompanying participants in both activities. Another period-of-service youth in Fargo, North Dakota, requested to end his stipend but continued to serve the community.

Youths who attended seminars of the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) have become some of the leading forces of advancement in the region.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

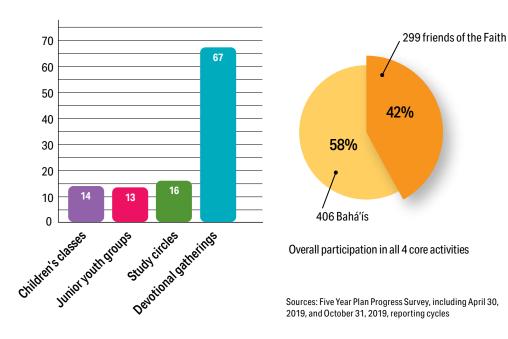
Inspired by the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, the number of devotional gatherings have increased slowly but steadily throughout the region. Teaching conferences and visits by Council members and Auxiliary Board members and their assistants have encouraged the friends to try new avenues to engage others in devotional gatherings and meaningful conversations. Videoconferencing has enabled isolated believers to participate with others in devotional gatherings and study.

Additional comments

Since the rollout of the online Statistical Report Program, visits to communities and tutors have strengthened understanding of the importance of the flow of information. Realization is growing that the information gathered is less about numbers and more about the progress of the community in bringing people closer to Bahá'u'lláh. The program can be a tool for gauging the progress of their community and cluster and help them make informed plans.

Much of this past year's progress can be attributed to the tireless work of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants.

110 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019

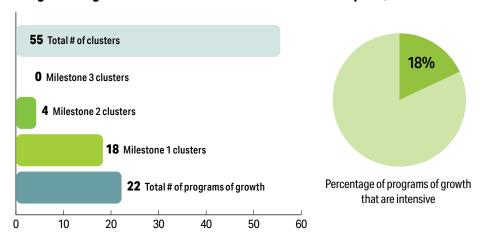


Homefront pioneers

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the Northern Plains States as of April 1, 2020



Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Northwestern States

y fall, devotional B_{gatherings} across the region had more than doubled in number. and a series of teaching conferences in September gave rise to further leaps in progress. Teaching conferences also helped instill a vision that fueled the holding of 674 observances of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, with 47 percent of those attending being friends of the Faith.



Advancement in programs of growth

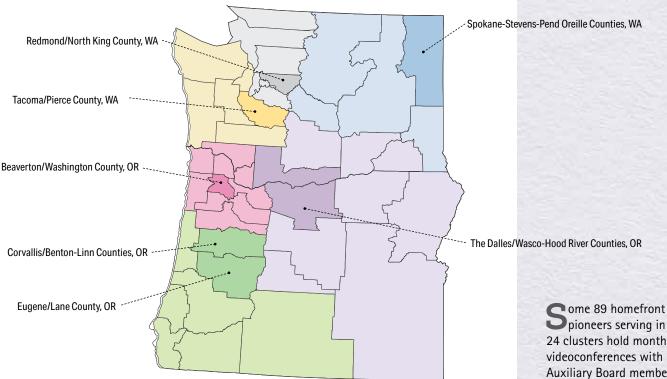
ust after Ridván 2019, the Regional Bahá'í Council and Auxiliary Board members began a joint learning process aimed at both strengthening the devotional spirit in communities and learning how to multiply devotional gatherings. By fall, devotional gatherings across the region had more than doubled in number. and a series of teaching conferences in September gave rise to further leaps in progress. Teaching conferences also helped instill a vision that fueled the holding of 674 observances of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, with 47 percent of those attending being friends of the Faith. This region-wide momentum spurred four additional clusters to pass the second milestone on the continuum of growth, while two more passed the third.

Strength of institute training

The Regional Training Institute has focused on developing capacity to assist youth as they advance along a path of service. On average, 60 youths entered institute activities each cycle during 2019–20. A systematic learning process included opportunities for regional-level reflection, the support of an institute resource person, growing experience with overnight camps, and systemization of summer campaigns. In April, a second learning process focused on the ways Ruhi Books 8 and 9 build capacity to foster a community's spiritual health. This tripled the number of friends studying Book 8, and attention has turned to supporting friends in studying Books 8, 9, and 10 in sequence.

Participation in core activities

Establishment of more than 650 new core activities represents a near-doubling of those activities this year. Participation also rose by 30 percent to around 6,000, well over a third of whom are friends of



the Faith. Thirty-eight out of 43 clusters have seen increases in total core activities and participation. The enthusiasm behind this surge was fueled by the region-wide focus on multiplying devotional gatherings. Children's classes held steady, while junior youth groups increased by approximately 30 percent in number, general attendance, and friends of the Faith attending since last year. Study circles have grown by 24 percent since the beginning of the Plan, with a 75 percent increase in friends of the Faith participating.

Deployment and support of homefront pioneers

Some 89 homefront pioneers serving in 24 clusters hold monthly videoconferences with an Auxiliary Board member and Regional Council members to study, reflect, plan, discuss strategies, and support one another. Eleven youths serve as pioneers in clusters that have attained the second or third milestones, while also serving as mobile resources in goal clusters.

Mobilization of youth

Across the Northwest, some 200 youths serve as children's class teachers, animators, and tutors. This includes 12 serving full time who are learning to foster the movement of their peers in neighborhood settings.

Advanced clusters with centers of intense activity are learning to mobilize increasing numbers of youth from the larger community. Oregon's Beaverton Central neighborhood leads the way with a team of 10 youth tutors—including two from the larger community—who are learning to accompany some 30 resident youths serving as children's class teachers and animators.

Learning in this and other advanced clusters is systematically shared across the region through the "Strengthening the Institute" learning process. As a result, a growing number of neighborhood efforts have taken root in second-milestone clusters, increasing opportunities to mo-

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bilize youth across the region. Overall, the region's experience highlights the importance of true friendship, genuine love, and continuing consultation in accompanying youth into service.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

Devotional gatherings have nearly tripled this year, with 600 new gatherings offered. Participation has doubled since last year and tripled since the beginning of the Plan-with friends of the Faith making up a third of the more than 4,000 attending. Nearly half of all clusters have more than doubled the total number of core activities. and three-quarters have seen at least a doubling of the number of devotionals. Participation at Feasts has increased, and a palpable sense of unity of vision and purpose pervades them. Enrollments continue to rise slightly, with a 20 percent increase for the third year in a row.

Additional comments

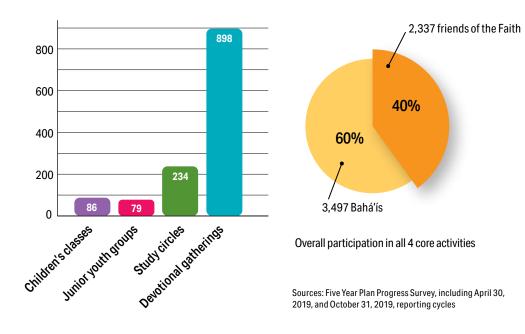
The number of social media outreach teams increased this year from two to eight across the region. Four teams involved for a full year attracted over 1,000 seekers to gatherings for meaningful conversations, with about a third returning regularly. These gatherings spawned an additional 51 core activities. To consider this outreach strategy in the region's 14 remaining goal clusters, a new social media team was formed in a

cluster seeking to advance past the first milestone.

The Council continues its systematic collaboration with the region's 113 Local Spiritual Assemblies, holding vision and planning sessions in August with all Assemblies and Area Teaching Committees. This assured their contributions to the success of both the devotional gatherings strategy and the impressive number of gatherings for the bicentenary of the Báb's Birth.

In late winter, the Regional Council and the Counselors began the visioning process for the last cycles of the Plan. Within five weeks, all the institutions and agencies involved themselves in a series of regional and subregional gatherings aimed at planning that will assure the winning of the Plan's goals.

1,297 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019

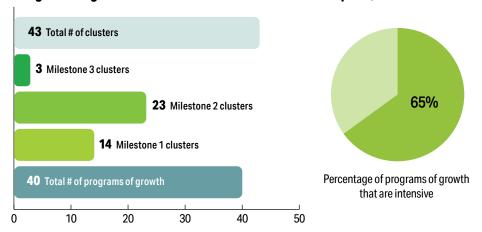


Homefront pioneers

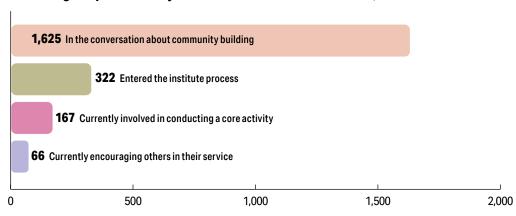
Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the Northwestern States as of April 1, 2020



Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Prairie States

Three clusters are building intensity in their programs of growth and are each expected to pass the second milestone by Riḍván or the summer of 2020. In more-rural clusters, growth is being seen in the expanding nuclei of friends as the framework of the Five Year Plan is more effectively being applied, often by homefront pioneers.



Advancements in programs of growth

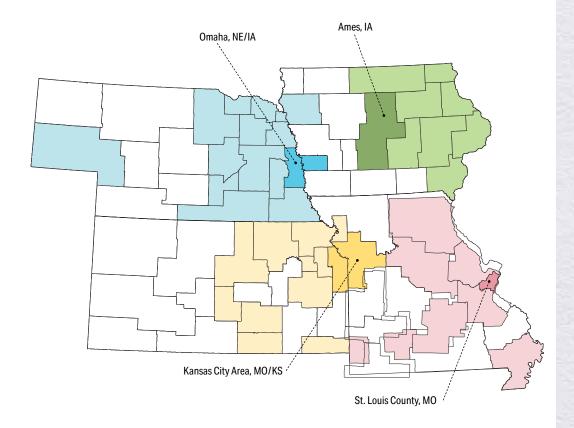
uring the year 2019–20, a notable development in the movement of clusters along the continuum of growth was seen in the Kansas City Area cluster in Missouri and Kansas, which passed the third milestone two weeks prior to the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. Principal contributions to this movement included the following:

- A growing consciousness of the goal and vision of the third milestone shared by individuals, institutions, and community.
- Gains in the Area Teaching Committee's strength as it learns to work with collaborators in forming and sustaining new devotional gatherings.

• The convening of a cluster institutional meeting and a subsequent teaching conference in the summer of 2019.

Central to the cluster's progress is a pattern of learning that continues to advance with the movement of a population in a center of intense activity, particularly among Swahili-speaking African immigrant families.

Three clusters—Springfield, Missouri; Topeka, Kansas; and Sioux City, lowa—are building intensity in their programs of growth and are each expected to pass the second milestone by Ridván or the summer of 2020. In more-rural clusters, growth is being seen in the expanding nuclei of friends as the framework of the Five Year Plan is more effectively being applied, often by homefront pioneers.



he Kansas City Area cluster has developed a regular pattern of opportunities for intensive institute training during semester breaks, and is striving to keep institute participants moving through the sequence throughout each cycle while building capacity in the field of service. Experienced tutors from Kansas City have assisted other reservoir clusters in beginning to develop a similar pattern of course delivery.

Efforts are underway to assist 20 clusters with programs of growth to pass the second milestone by the end of the Plan.

Strength of institute training

Central to the movement of clusters is a strengthening of the institute process. Efforts have focused on moving youth into the sequence of courses, fostering in each cycle a steady flow into Ruhi Book 1. The Kansas City Area cluster has developed a regular pattern of opportunities for intensive institute training during semester breaks, and is striving to keep institute participants moving through the sequence throughout each cycle while building capacity in the field of service. Experienced tutors from Kansas City have assisted other reservoir clusters in beginning to develop a similar pattern of course delivery.

The junior youth spiritual empowerment program has grown steadily, with graduates enriching the program as they are trained and begin to serve as animators. Junior youth camps occur regularly in the Kansas City Area cluster, and the Regional Training Institute aims to establish them in every reservoir cluster. Occasions for regional and cluster reflection for tutors, animators, and children's class teachers are becoming more regular and accessible.

Participation in core activities

Significant increases in core activities occurred over the past year, particularly in connection with the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. Just preceding and following the region's many celebrations, the number of devotional gatherings rose by more than 60 percent, and study circles rose by 40 percent. Over the past

In one cluster nearing an intensive program of growth, a pioneer contributed significantly to an expanding nucleus in a neighborhood. In a similar cluster, a retired couple has been instrumental, through consistent and sacrificial expansion and consolidation efforts, in widening the number of friends working together to serve their neighborhood.



year, core activities as a whole increased by 32 percent.

Deployment of homefront pioneers

The deployment of homefront pioneers continues to be a primary strategy to attain the goals of the Plan in the Prairie States. Forty-one homefront pioneers are currently working in clusters across the region. In one cluster nearing an intensive program of growth, a pioneer contributed significantly to an expanding nucleus in a neighborhood. In a similar cluster, a retired couple has been instrumental, through consistent and sacrificial expansion and consolidation efforts, in widening the number of friends working together to serve their neighborhood. While the number of pioneers settled in the Prairie States is significant, there are still tens of clusters where homefront pioneers will be required to attain or to significantly advance toward an intensive program of growth.

Mobilization of youth

A summer of service program for orientation, training, and accompaniment of youth has sought to further the pace of growth in clusters where youth are deployed and quicken it in their home clusters when they return.

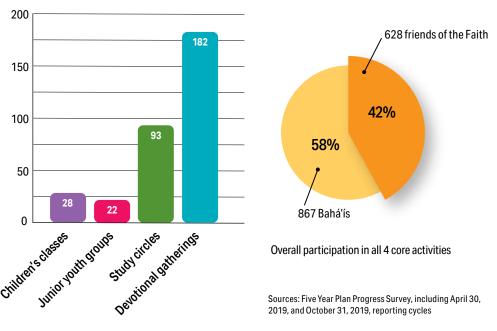
Last summer, eight youths and young adults arose and dedicated themselves

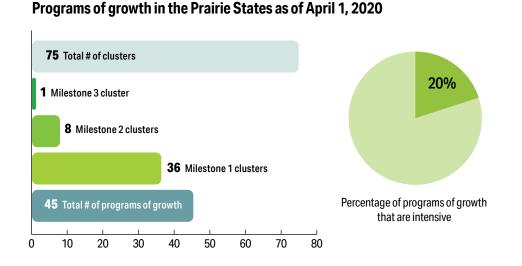
full time to furthering the work of the Cause. After orientation and a period of study and training in Kansas City and St. Louis, these friends were deployed to reinforce efforts in neighborhoods in Topeka, Kansas; Springfield, Missouri; and Kansas City, Missouri. For the summer of 2020, it is hoped that several more clusters will benefit from youth pioneers.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

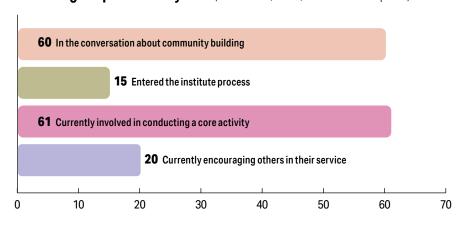
Where patterns of learning to sustain growth and build capacity are occurring, a swelling spirit of enthusiasm to teach is apparent. More people are stepping into the realm of action, often by creating spaces for prayer and worship. Souls from the larger community, inspired by the Word of God and longing to play their part in the transformation of their communities, are arising as protagonists. They host in their own homes gatherings of family and friends for prayer, the education of children, and programs for junior youth, youth, and adults. In these examples, the region sees how growth in a cluster can quickly move along a path of development and how the friends can win the goals of the Plan.

325 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019





Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Regional Bahá'í Council — Prairie States

Homefront pioneers

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



South Central States

The Regional Training Institute has engaged in a learning process to strengthen patterns of collaboration. Teams of friends from emerging neighborhoods visit reservoir clusters to participate in expansion phases, home visits, reflection spaces, and interinstitutional gatherings, then return home and share their learning.



Advancements in programs of growth

rograms of growth in the South Central region have made steady progress during 2019–20. Three clusters passed the third milestone of growth, and two more seek to do so by the close of the Five Year Plan. Six goal clusters are approaching the second milestone, the number of seekers has grown by 11.9 percent, and online registrations rose by 15.9 percent. The region's transition to the online Statistical Report Program is proving valuable for analyzing and planning for growth.

Strength of institute training

The Regional Training Institute (RTI) has engaged in a learning process to strengthen patterns of collaboration. Teams of friends from emerging neighborhoods visit reservoir clusters to participate in expansion phases, home visits, reflection spaces, and inter-

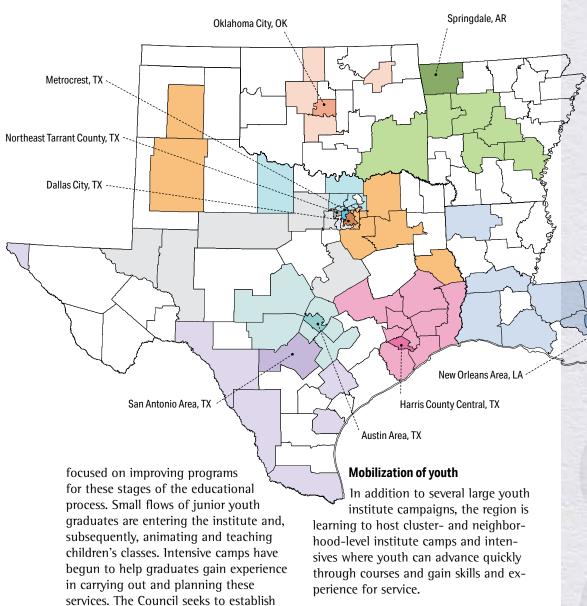
institutional gatherings, then return home and share their learning.

A visit to the Southeast region's tutor preparation gatherings helped the RTI consider qualities, skills, and abilities needed to guide study circles effectively and accompany collaborators into the field of action.

The RTI is also learning to disseminate the ever-increasing flow of new institute materials within clusters rather than region-wide spaces. This strengthens collaboration between teams of capable tutors, regional coordinators, and Auxiliary Board members and their assistants.

Participation in core activities

Inspired by children's classes that advance from grade to grade and junior youth groups that transition together into the main sequence of courses, the Council is increasingly



Deployment of homefront pioneers

junior youth groups in all goal clusters.

Since Riḍván 2019, 19 homefront pioneers have settled in focus neighborhoods and first-milestone clusters. Virtual reflection gatherings allow pioneers to share insights and plan for next steps. The Council is continuously learning how best to accompany pioneers and support them in building capacity through service. Youth pioneers have helped fulfill the Council's long-term commitment to the movement of populations within specific neighborhoods.

Increasingly, junior youth groups start meetings with prayers. This has led to conversations within whole families on the importance of prayer, and some animators have accompanied junior youths who start family devotionals. Also, opportunities have been created for parents, especially from the larger community, to widen their understanding of the

Quality of community life and its devotional character

program by reviewing junior youth texts.

In joyful celebration, 191 commemorations of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb attracted 6,200 souls, including more than 1,600 friends ncreasingly, junior youth groups start meetings

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neighbors, and co-workers
to pray together regularly.



of the Faith; 12 embraced the Cause during the bicentenary season. Viewing celebrations as part of a coherent process, friends continue to strengthen friendships and invite families and friends to participate in community-building activities.

The Council aims to achieve 900 devotional gatherings by Riḍván 2020, and victory is near. Area Teaching Committees and regional growth facilitators are accompanying several communities in devotional gathering workshops, and others are studying the compilation "Enhancing the Devotional Character of Our Lives," which inspires many to invite friends, neighbors, and co-workers to pray together regularly.

Teaching conferences

The Council hosted eight teaching conferences in three states in response to the International Teaching Center's letter on May 3, 2018. The Louisiana conference's theme was "Learning about the Dynamics of Growth in the African American community." With 529 total participants, the conferences included prayer, joyful music, study of guidance, and field experience. Participants also phoned 350 seekers in the Seeker Response System database. High spirits following conferences rekindled in many souls a passion for teaching, and seven people embraced the Faith. Auxiliary Board members are planning

approximately 30 additional cluster-level teaching conferences.

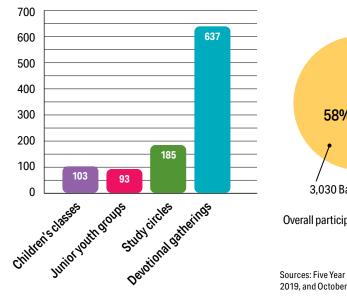
Social media outreach

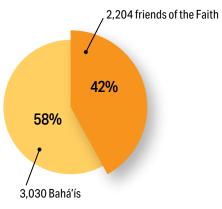
Two cluster-based social media outreach teams are engaging people from the larger community in conversations on topics such as "Finding Meaning in Life's Difficulties" or "The Soul and the Scientific Method." Accompanied by Auxiliary Board and Regional Council members, these efforts have attracted more than 100 participants to weekly discussions, with more than a third returning. Team members nurture friendships—which have led to study circles, devotionals, and children's classes—reflect on experiences, and teach the Faith when appropriate.

Collaboration with Local Spiritual Assemblies

Collaboration with local institutions is coming into sharper focus as Assemblies assist cluster agencies, individuals, and families in community building. Assemblies contributed to the success of bicentenary celebrations and teaching conferences, not least by promoting them at Feasts. In more advanced clusters, cyclical inter-institutional meetings gather for consultation Assemblies, Auxiliary Board members, cluster institute coordinators, Area Teaching Committee members, and regional growth facilitators.

1,018 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019





Overall participation in all 4 core activities

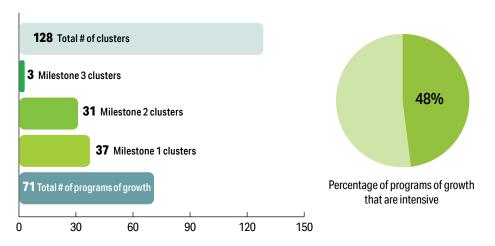
 $Sources: Five Year\ Plan\ Progress\ Survey, including\ April\ 30,\\ 2019, and\ October\ 31,\ 2019, reporting\ cycles$

Homefront pioneers

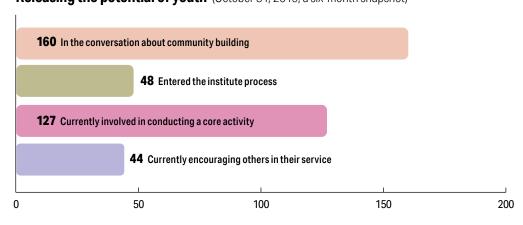
Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the South Central States as of April 1, 2020



Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Southeastern States

he Regional Training Institute established a more regular rhythm of gatherings to help friends build capacity and engage in learning. A quarterly gathering brings together tutors from across the region to generate, disseminate, and apply insights garnered at the grass roots. These have included the many ways tutors invite, train, and accompany growing numbers of people, especially youth, who contribute to community building in neighborhoods.



Advancement in programs of growth

ith energy devoted to a pattern of devotional gatherings and consistent efforts to engage friends in the Champion Green focus neighborhood, the North Fulton cluster in Georgia advanced during 2019-20 to the third milestone on the continuum of growth, sustaining 103 core activities that engage significant numbers from the community of interest. The nearby Northeast of Atlanta cluster advanced to the second milestone in the afterglow of bicentenary celebrations, raising 28 protagonists engaged in activities with 134 participants.

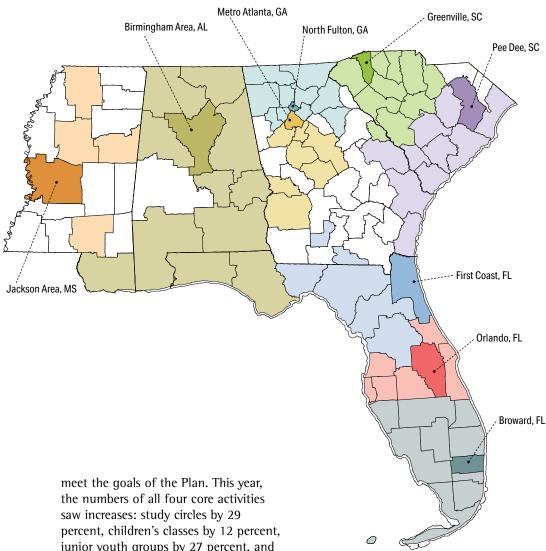
Strength of institute training

The Regional Training Institute (RTI) this past year established a more regular rhythm of gatherings to help friends build capacity and engage in learning.

A quarterly gathering brings together tutors from across the region to generate, disseminate, and apply insights garnered at the grass roots. These have included the many ways tutors invite, train, and accompany growing numbers of people, especially youth, who contribute to community building in neighborhoods. The seventh and most recent gathering focused on the expansion of nuclei of friends serving in neighborhoods and the importance of effective accompaniment in this process. Having learned how vital tutor preparation is for the quality of institute camps and study circles, the RTI hosted a series of seminars for active tutors to review critical concepts from Ruhi Book 7 and to practice the use of arts and memorization to create spiritual dynamics.

Participation in core activities

There has been a region-wide increase in core activities as individuals arise to



meet the goals of the Plan. This year, the numbers of all four core activities saw increases: study circles by 29 percent, children's classes by 12 percent, junior youth groups by 27 percent, and devotional gatherings by 76 percent. The online version of the Statistical Report Program (SRP) greatly assisted in the accurate gathering and analysis of related data.

Deployment of homefront pioneers

A small number of additional homefront pioneers were deployed this year. The Council's Pioneer Working Group has begun regular collaborative conference/video calls with friends serving in this capacity to study relevant guidance and share experiences and approaches to fostering an expanding nucleus. Institute-created occasions in reservoir clusters and across the region also welcome pioneers to study guidance, reflect, and plan to engage others in the institute process.

Mobilization of youth

A regular rhythm of youth institute camps during school breaks in an increasing number of reservoir clusters bolstered the mobilization of youth this past year. The Metro Atlanta cluster invited tutors and youth from focus neighborhoods throughout the region to sleep-away camps, where participants immerse themselves in the Writings in an environment that empowers both Bahá'ís and friends of the Faith as they build capacity to walk a path of service.

Understanding and motivation increase when participants carry out the practices from their respective Ruhi books, including the study of prayers and visits

regular rhythm of youth institute camps during school breaks in an increasing number of reservoir clusters bolstered the mobilization of youth this past year. The Metro Atlanta cluster invited tutors and youth from focus neighborhoods throughout the region to sleep-away camps, where participants immerse themselves in the Writings in an environment that empowers both Bahá'ís and friends of the Faith as they build capacity to walk a path of service.

rowth in the number of devotional gatherings was achieved through sharing of inspirational stories and study of guidance during home visits; through local gatherings of devotional hosts who reflected on this foundational activity in community life; and through the wholehearted participation of Local Spiritual Assemblies—with accompaniment from Area Teaching Committees—in mobilizing friends to achieve these goals.



to the homes of others in the cluster. In particular, Florence in South Carolina's Pee Dee cluster and the Indian Creek neighborhood in the Metro Atlanta cluster have seen increasing numbers of youth engaging in conversations, taking part in the institute process, and hosting core activities this past year.

Quality of community life and its devotional character

In response to the call to double the number of devotional gatherings by the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. friends across the Southeast increased devotionals from 400 to about 700, with approximate participation growing from 2,700 to 3,800, more than 30 percent being friends of the Faith. This growth was achieved through sharing of inspirational stories and study of guidance during home visits; through local gatherings of devotional hosts who reflected on this foundational activity in community life; and through the wholehearted participation of Local Spiritual Assemblies—with accompaniment from Area Teaching Committees—in mobilizing friends to achieve these goals. In many clusters, an expanding number of devotional hosts are striving to learn how to have meaningful conversations and invite participants into the institute process and other core activities.

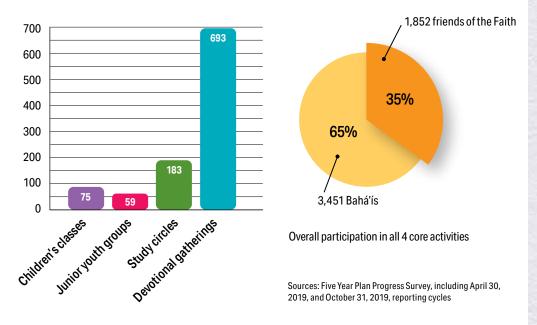
Teaching conferences

In July 2019, two teaching conferences—in Columbia, South Carolina, and Jackson, Mississippi—attracted 130 participants who are working to build community in African-American neighborhoods. Goals included:

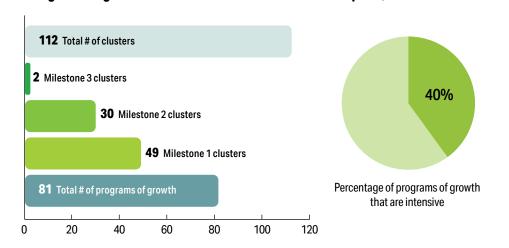
- Understanding "how the framework of the Five Year Plan provides the most effective means to steadily and inevitably eradicate the ills that afflict our nation—racial prejudice not least among them."
- Increasing teaching among those whose focus is in African-American neighborhoods.
- Expanding the circle of African-American Bahá'ís and friends of the Faith, especially youth, who are engaged in the institute process and associated acts of service.

Through a series of additional teaching conferences, which focused on engaging the friends in immediate and systematic action, the Council is striving to strengthen the spirit of teaching to unleash the potential of all friends in North America toward winning the goals of the Plan, helping everyone to see themselves as part of an expanding nucleus.

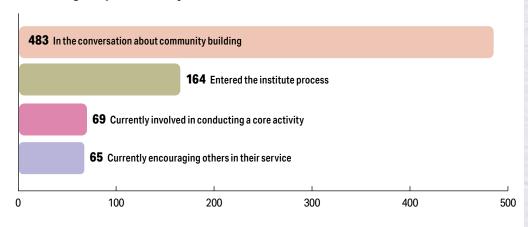
1,010 core activities underway as of October 31, 2019



Programs of growth in the Southeastern States as of April 1, 2020



Releasing the potential of youth (October 31, 2019, a six-month snapshot)



Regional Bahá'í Council – Southeastern States

Homefront pioneers

Deployed during the 12 months from November 1, 2018 to October 31, 2019





WLGI RADIO BAHÁ'Í, HEMINGWAY, SOUTH CAROLINA

s Radio Bahá'í WLGI carries out its primary mission of promoting the principle of the oneness of humanity and racial amity, listeners naturally share comments about what they hear on the station and how it influences their lives. This recent statement reflects the spirit of many of those messages:

I have listened to the station from time to time over many, many years. . . . I am currently doing a 30-day challenge to only listen to inspirational music to start off the New Year right and I can tell you it has really changed my spirit and daily motivation. . . . I plan to keep tuning in. I realized I needed more spiritual support and focus in my day. Praise God! All of you at the station are doing a wonderful ministry. Thank you so much.

Broadcasting at 90.9 FM primarily to the five counties surrounding the Louis G. Gregory Bahá'í Institute in Hemingway, South Carolina, the station offers programming that connects hearts with the love of God and inspires them to serve others. In the knowledge that the Word of God is the master key to the hearts of all people, and that music is as a ladder for the soul, Radio Bahá'í combines these two powerful forces to promote love for all humanity.

Equipment upgrades

During 2019–20, Radio Bahá'í completed several critical projects to reduce operating costs and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the station's small staff, which encompasses the equivalent of 3.5 full-time employees and seven volunteers. These projects included:

- Phased replacement of the 22-yearold control-room equipment.
- Improvements in computer-related infrastructure and support systems.

• Replacement of the 30-year-old lighting system for the 500-foot broadcast tower.

Providing information and comfort during hurricanes and other damaging storms is an important service of Radio Bahá'í to its listening area. To ensure the station can continue broadcasting when electrical service is interrupted, a low-power transmitter was purchased capable of broadcasting to about a third of the normal area on generator power when needed.

Engagement with listeners in support of the Plan

Also completed this year was a branding project that included a new logo and website. With these in place, the staff has begun a systematic effort to increase the number of listeners through a higher level of engagement with the audience, promoting the station on the Web (at www.radiobahai.us) and on Facebook, Twitter, and <a href="mailto:Instagram. The increased social media presence included Facebook live videos with quotes from the Bahá'í writings, various facts from Bahá'í history, and featured interviews.

Internet listeners can stream WLGI programming in a variety of ways, all of which are described on the website. Plans are in the works for a new app for listening to the station that includes many interactive features.

Radio Bahá'í will also be present with a clearly branded tent at community festivals and events. This new effort will be made in collaboration with Bahá'í communities and cluster agencies to support their work toward the goals of the Five Year Plan.

Radio Bahá'í's contribution to the observance of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb included 13 newly produced vignettes drawn from the lives of the Báb and of His early followers, as well as heavy promotion of the various events hosted by Bahá'í communities in the broadcast area.

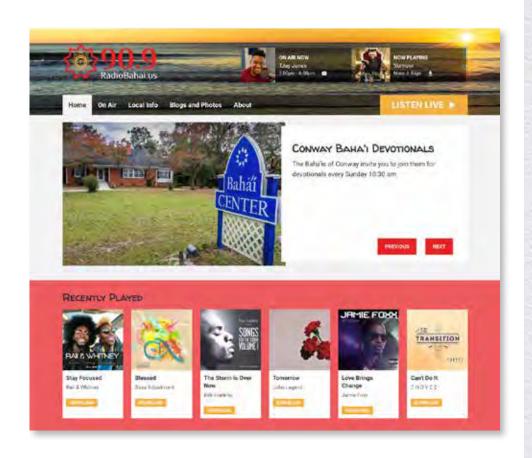
The station depends on volunteers, most of whom come from the broadcast audience. The newest volunteers are a high school student and his mother. The student, enrolled in a service

learning class, decided to ask about volunteering at Radio Bahá'í because he remembered visiting years earlier on a tour with his Cub Scout pack and was impressed by the "feeling" at the station. When his mother brought him to inquire, her experience convinced her that she wanted to volunteer as well.

Radio Bahá'í continues to be heard playing in the background at local businesses where the family-friendly and spiritually uplifting programming



is much appreciated. Frequently, people in the broadcast area tell their Bahá'í friends how highly they value the station, opening the door to conversations. Other listeners provide feedback through phone calls, text messages, and social media, including this comment: "I listen to Radio Bahá'í daily. Thank you for the Beautiful Music that you play daily. May the Lord God continue blessing all of you for sharing your love of music [with] your faithful listeners."





Office of Public Affairs

he Office of Public Affairs (OPA) in Washington, DC, represents the National Spiritual Assembly in its relationships with the United States government, civil society, the media, and the public. The work of OPA focuses on human rights, especially the defense of Bahá'ís undergoing persecution in Iran, Yemen, and other countries; public discourse in the areas of race relations, the role of the media in society, gender equality and the advancement of women, economic inequality, and sustainable development including climate change; and representation of the Bahá'ís of the United States at the United Nations.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Persecution of the Bahá'ís

In spring 2019, the Bahá'í world faced an urgent concern that, in a hearing scheduled for April 30, an appellate judge would uphold a death sentence against Mr. Hamed bin Haydara, a Bahá'í prisoner in Yemen. OPA obtained a press statement from the US State Department strongly condemning the mistreatment of Mr. Haydara and the Bahá'ís of Yemen. The press statement was picked up by a number of outlets, including the AFP wire service, and distributed widely, together with a press release by OPA that built upon the press statement. English, Arabic, and Persian media commented on the State Department's press statement, or distributed either the AFP article or the OPA press release. Among them were Alhurra, the US government's equivalent to Voice of America for the Arab world; The National, based in the United Arab Emirates; France 24; and the Daily Mail. Notably, the Fars News Agency, an Iranian state-controlled entity, reported on OPA's press release. An English translation of its short article is as follows:

"Support by the American Department of State for the Baha'is in Yemen. Global News Wire Website reported that Department of State's Spokesman Morgan Ortagus read a statement expressing [the] profound concern of Washington about the reported continuation of the detention and torture of the Baha'is by the Houthis. The statement read that 'consistent abuse, humiliation, and mistreatment of the Baha'is by the Houthis must stop.' Claiming [to be speaking] in the name of freedom of religion, the statement also openly supported the members of the misquided Baha'i sect and defended the leader of the misguided sect in Yemen, Hamid Bin Haydara. The new Washington move was welcomed by the Director of the American Baha'i Council, Anthony Vance. The Baha'i sect is illegal in Yemen and following it results in prosecution."

Excellent support from the US government, particularly the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), continued throughout the year, as it issued statements, via Twitter, in advance of all of Mr. Haydara's scheduled hearings during the reporting period.

OPA also drew on the talents and experiences of American Bahá'ís born or raised in Arabic-speaking countries in a seminar held June 1–2 at OPA's office in Washington. Fourteen bilingual Bahá'í collaborators were in attendance. A central goal was to build capacity to write opinion pieces and pitches for articles related to the defense of the Bahá'ís in Yemen. An immediate result was the June 14 publication in *The Wall Street Journal* of an opinion piece concerning Mr. Haydara, written by one of the collaborators, Ms. Hend Altamimi.

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Persian Public Information

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In a remarkable sequence of events, three days after an appellate court in Yemen upheld Mr. Haydara's death sentence—an action that triggered an intense publicity and advocacy effort by OPA and Bahá'í public affairs offices worldwide-on March 25, 2020, in a televised address, the president of the Houthi Supreme Political Council in Yemen, Mr. Mahdi al-Mashat. announced the release of all Bahá'í prisoners in Yemen, including a pardon for Mr. Haydara.

Later, on February 24, 2020, Religion News Service published an opinion piece by another collaborator, Dr. Nabil Elias, concerning the trial of 24 other Yemeni Bahá'ís. The State Department assisted with a statement that was picked up on February 23 and widely distributed by AFP.

In a remarkable sequence of events, three days after an appellate court in Yemen upheld Mr. Haydara's death sentence-an action that triggered an intense publicity and advocacy effort by OPA and Bahá'í public affairs offices worldwide-on March 25, 2020, in a televised address, the president of the Houthi Supreme Political Council in Yemen, Mr. Mahdi al-Mashat, announced the release of all Bahá'í prisoners in Yemen, including a pardon for Mr. Haydara. On the same day, the Bahá'í International Community welcomed this announcement, urged its speedy implementation, together with the return of confiscated Bahá'í property and freedom for Bahá'í institutions to function.

In addition to the outreach, education, and advocacy efforts noted above, OPA's director and its human rights officer engaged with faith-based groups and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in a number of settings. The most important of these was the International Religious Freedom Roundtable. Over the past three years, this civil-society group has grown from roughly 60 participating organizations to at least double that number. This is due primarily to the US State Department's increased participation. It hosted the second Secretary of State's Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, held July 16–17, which drew over a thousand participants to explore central issues related to international religious persecution. Bahá'í International Community officials Mr. Joshua Lincoln and Ms. Diane Ala'i were among the 11 Bahá'ís from the United States and beyond who attended in addition to the OPA officers. Just prior to the opening of the Ministerial, OPA organized a side event sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (TWI) titled "Disinformation in Iran: The Case

of Religious Minorities," held at TWI offices. It featured Ms. Azadeh Pourzand. executive director of the Siamak Pourzand Foundation, an NGO dedicated to freedom of expression, who provided a superb presentation on the use of misinformation against the Bahá'ís of Iran; Mr. Hamid Gharagozloo, who represents the Gonabadi Sufi community; and Ms. Shirin Kargar, an affiliate of the Berkman Klein Center on the Internet and Society at Harvard University, who ably explained some of the technical aspects of producing misinformation, including that directed against the Bahá'í community. The live-streamed event introduced religious freedom as a central issue into the discourse of TWL

OPA's outreach extended also to the Defending Freedoms Project of the congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. This project publicizes the cases of individuals incarcerated for exercising basic freedoms, such as religion or belief, and OPA provided information about specific imprisoned Bahá'ís in Iran and Yemen. OPA's officers attended numerous State Department, congressional, and civil society events featuring the human rights abuses in Iran and Yemen. Most notable among these was a State Department event concerning Iran on December 19, attended by about 300 members of civil society organizations, primarily Iranians, from around the United States, and representatives from about 30 embassies. During the plenary session, there were speeches by Mr. Brian Hook, the US special representative on Iran, in which the plight of the Bahá'ís was featured prominently; and by Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, who also mentioned the persecution of the Bahá'ís.

The State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report again documented in detail, with OPA assistance, the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, as well as the repression of Bahá'ís in Yemen. The Office liaised with State Department officials to support the efforts of the US Mission to the UN to advocate for the Bahá'ís in Iran, including the December 18 passage of the 2019



General Assembly resolution on human rights violations in Iran, which specifically mentioned the persecution of the Bahá'ís and emphasized the need to protect religious minorities unrecognized in Iran's constitution and laws.

For most of 2019, significantly increased tension and conflict characterized Iran's domestic and international relations. These tensions affected US politics and complicated the introduction of congressional resolutions in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Eventually, on January 30, 2020, H. Res. 823 was introduced in the House. In addition to specifying various acts of persecution directed against the Bahá'ís in Iran, the resolution, for the first time, also draws attention to Iranian influence on the Houthi authorities in Yemen where the persecution of Bahá'ís bears striking similarities to the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran. On February 4, five days after the introduction of H. Res. 823, the internationally recognized government of Yemen shared on Twitter its endorsement of the resolution and accused Iran of "directing authorities in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen to harass and detain #Baha'is because of their religious affiliation." Congressional co-sponsors additional to the bipartisan group of 10 original sponsors are being sought in preparation for passage later this year. The introduction of a similar resolution in the Senate remains pending.

Despite the delay in the introduction of a House resolution on the Bahá'ís in Iran, OPA continued to oversee the systematic work of Bahá'í delegations, supervised by selected Local Spiritual Assemblies, to meet and develop continuing relationships with members of Congress and their staffs about the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. OPA's communications manager coordinates this nationwide effort. The relationships built and the capacities developed facilitated communications with congressional field offices for the support of H. Res. 823.

Other issues

The Office interacts with representatives of NGOs and other actors about human rights issues, such as the criminal justice system, especially recidivism and reentry into society, religion and the rights of women, and the International Criminal Court (ICC). With respect to the latter, the human rights officer participates in the Washington Working Group for the International Criminal Court where participants coordinate efforts to educate the Congress and civil society about the ICC.

RACE DISCOURSE

OPA continued its long-standing engagement on issues of racial justice and racial unity, primarily through the work of its two race discourse officers. OPA engaged in efforts to gain a deeper understanding of the national discourse on

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In addition to being present in existing spaces, the Office learned more about creating social spaces, including the Dialogue on Faith and Race, a quarterly discussion series that OPA has been convening, in partnership with The Catholic University of America, since January 2017. OPA has hosted 12 of these gatherings, which bring together representatives of about three dozen national-level faith-based organizations. to consider and discuss issues of race from a spiritual perspective.



race by studying content from writers, thinkers, and activists, and by attending events and exploring issues of race from many perspectives. Staff members built and cultivated relationships with colleagues from civil society and government, meeting and consulting with contacts in government agencies, NGOs, universities, and community organizations to learn more about their work. share OPA's interests and efforts, and explore opportunities for collaboration and partnership. OPA consulted and collaborated with Bahá'ís around the country who have expertise with issues of race, exploring the institutional guidance and conceptual framework that inform the Office's efforts. This multifaceted process of collaboration and learning is aimed at finding opportunities for engagement in, and contributions to, the national-level discourse.

The Office remained engaged in several social spaces, attending and participating in conferences, panel discussions, forums, and coalitions, such as the Washington Inter-Religious Staff Community Working Group on Race and the Justice Roundtable. OPA was present at the Othering & Belonging Conference in Oakland, California; a Reparations Summit at the University of Chicago; The Poor People's Moral Action Congress in Washington, DC; the 100th Birthday Celebration of Jimmy Boggs, hosted in Detroit by the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership; Honoring Native Survivance, a conference of the National Native

American Boarding School Healing Coalition in Tulalip, Washington; and many local one-day events. The Office has been strengthening its relationships with the National Spiritual Assembly's Learning and Social Action Desks, discussing the insights gained from the Bahá'í community on issues of racial prejudice.

In addition to being present in existing spaces, the Office learned more about creating social spaces, including the Dialogue on Faith and Race, a quarterly discussion series that OPA has been convening, in partnership with The Catholic University of America, since January 2017. OPA has hosted 12 of these gatherings, which bring together representatives of about three dozen national-level faith-based organizations, to consider and discuss issues of race from a spiritual perspective. Each session focused on a different topic, such as the relationship between justice and unity and the role of the individual, the community, and the institution in eliminating racism. Related to its efforts to be present in and convene social spaces, OPA has generated content to contribute to the discourse on race, including discussion papers, presentations, thought pieces, and other materials in which it can offer concepts and ideas inspired by the teachings of the Faith and the Bahá'í community's experience in applying them.

This year the Office focused on learning more about themes from the discourse on race, including the history of race in the United States and the role of narrative, participation, truth, repair from harm done, reconciliation, systems change, the role of religion in the elimination of racism, and the building of champions of racial justice.

The role that the upcoming National Race Unity Conference will play in the national discourse continues to develop through experience and consultation with the National Spiritual Assembly and the Office of Public Discourse at the Bahá'í World Center. The Office views the conference as part of its wider process of engaging in the national discourse on race, and will pursue it within a similar framework. The conference offers OPA an opportunity to work alongside those engaged in the elimination of racism to transcend language and practices that are inherently divisive and to unite on the basis of common beliefs and principles.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Print media and television

OPA produced and distributed press releases highlighting the meetings and events it organized, and worked with individuals and reporters to publish articles on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Yemen, under the direction of its media officer.

Press releases were issued concerning the Yárán, the Bahá'ís in Iran generally, and the Bahá'ís in Yemen. Several were picked up by prominent news outlets, including the <u>Associated Press.</u>

As the OPA liaised with the State Department to issue a statement about the Bahá'ís in Yemen that resulted in international publicity (see above in "Human Rights" section), the media officer also took part in a social media campaign to promote a related video statement by the Bahá'í International Community (BIC), with participation by Bahá'í celebrities, that garnered over 240,000 views on Twitter. The media officer also assisted in coordination of the gathering to increase Arab-American Bahá'ís' media capacity that resulted in articles in *The*

<u>Wall Street Journal</u> and <u>Religion News</u> <u>Service</u> (see above in "Human Rights" section).

OPA held an event at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace that resulted in several articles and television segments in major media outlets, including BBC Persian and Alhurra.

In September, coinciding with the beginning of the school year in Iran and America, OPA produced a <u>video</u> with actor Mr. Penn Badgley featuring former Iranian students, which drew attention to the educational discrimination faced by Iranian Bahá'ís. The video received 182,000 views on Twitter and over 140,000 likes on Instagram.

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Social media

Through the work of its social media officer, OPA utilized Facebook, Twitter, and the OPA website (publicaffairs.bahai. us) to share news about the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Yemen, as well as articles and information about the continuing discourses in OPA's other areas of work. The media officer conducted successful outreach with several national-level reporters on Twitter, and had meaningful conversations with many media professionals on themes relating to the role of media in society.

Correspondence with individual Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions

OPA regularly corresponded with Bahá'ís around the country who had media-related inquiries. The media officer worked with Local Spiritual Assemblies and their public information officers to address local media needs.

Discourse work: conferences, talks, and travel

OPA was present at several events and conferences including the Hearken

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The Office continues to support and engage with the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015 to 2024). The representative attended the Latin American Studies Association Congress, "Nuestra América: Justice and Inclusion" in Boston, which had as a component the status and struggle for justice and Inclugion of Afro-Latin and Indigenous peoples.

Summit in New York City; the Solutions Journalism Summit at Sundance Resort, Utah; the Theorizing the Web conference in New York City; the Iran Cyber Dialogue in Washington, DC; the Power of Narrative conference in Boston; and others. Each provided opportunities to learn more about media discourse and build relationships with journalists and media professionals.

The media officer continued to build relationships with several Washington-based reporters and journalists. This culminated in OPA's hosting of five Critical Media Roundtables, which featured lunch discussions on issues pertinent to the role of the media in society. Themes have included trust and disinformation, solutions journalism, objectivity and identity, the power and seduction of narrative, and the relationship between journalism and the business models that support it. Participants have included journalists and media professionals from such outlets as The Washington Post, Mother Jones, BBC, The Huffington Post. NPR. Al-Watan, and several others.

The media officer assisted with the coordination, production, and release of OPA's podcast series *Illumine America*. Two episodes were released, and another is in production.

COMMUNICATIONS

OPA managed Bahá'í communications on public affairs-related issues with individuals, government and public agencies, nationallevel organizations, and prominent people. It also corresponded with the US Bahá'í community, including individual Bahá'ís, Local Spiritual Assemblies, and other Bahá'í agencies, through its communications manager. Topics included:

- Human rights
- The Middle East, including the defense of the Bahá'ís in Iran and engagement with members of Congress through Bahá'í delegation advocacy and relationship building
- Interfaith organizations
- Current controversial issues drawing public attention

Supporting OPA's educational mandate, the communications manager began delivering presentations about the work of OPA and general public affairs guidance to Local Spiritual Assembly members attending Special Visit programs at the Bahá'í National Center. These presentations share insights and best practices to assist Assemblies in their management of local public-affairs matters, as well as helping them better understand how public-affairs matters are managed at the national and international levels.

UNITED NATIONS

Since its inception, the United Nations Office of the Bahá'ís of the United States (US-UN) has been affiliated with the UN through its Department of Public Information (DPI). Last year DPI changed its name to the Department of Global Communications (UNDGC). The UN Office in New York City supports the aims of UNDGC by assisting it with public outreach to civil society regarding the work of the UN and by supporting the UN's organizational plan of action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It focuses its work on some of the Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets through the efforts of the National Spiritual Assembly's representative to the UN, the Office's administrative assistant, and its youth representative to UNDGC. Of particular concern to the US-UN Office are the following goals:

 Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

The US-UN Office was a member of A CALL TO MEN's Healthy Manhood Collaborative, which organizes events in New York City that promote healthy masculinity. The representative continued to participate in the men's roundtable of CONNECT NYC, which seeks to create safe families and peaceful communities by transforming the beliefs, behaviors, and institutions that perpetuate violence. He also attends conferences and symposia at the Barnard Center for Research on Women. The representative is also a regular attendee at the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women,

which was canceled this year because of concerns about the worldwide COVID-19 outbreak.

 Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries; Target 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

Race: The Office continues to support and engage with the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015 to 2024). The representative attended the Latin American Studies Association Congress, "Nuestra América: Justice and Inclusion" in Boston, which had as a component the status and struggle for justice and freedom of Afro-Latin and Indigenous peoples. Religion: The US-UN representative is serving on the Bureau of the Committee of Religious NGOs at the UN (CRNGO) as an ex-officio member. CRNGO continues to support the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, organized by the UN Alliance of Civilizations. CRNGO also supports World Interfaith Harmony Week, founded by HM King Abdullah II of Jordan and supported by the UN General Assembly. The representative attended the National Convention of Faith-Oriented ERGs (Employee Resource Groups) in Washington, DC.

• Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

The youth representative was elected co-chair of the Youth Steering Committee for UNDGC, which helped organize the Youth Climate Summit that took place as part of a series of events leading to the UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit and the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Collaboration with the Bahá'í International Community (BIC)

The US-UN Office continues to work closely with the BIC at the UN, regularly consulting and collaborating with its UN representatives on a variety of initiatives.

GENDER EQUALITY AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Through the efforts of its representative for Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women (AOW representative), OPA pursued activities in several spaces to advance public thought and action toward the realization of the equality of women and men in society.

OPA remained an active member of the Interfaith Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, a group of national faithbased organizations advocating for public policies in support of the well-being of women and girls; and the US Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (CSWG), convened by the US Institute of Peace, which recognizes the instrumental role of women and gender equality in forging and sustaining peace. Through the CSWG, the AOW representative was invited to serve as an expert discussant for the Women in International Security 2019 Gender, Peace and Security Next Generation Symposium in Washington, and in various discussions on religion and women's participation. Toward the end of 2019, OPA began hosting a monthly lunchtime discussion group on Gender, Peace and Security, co-facilitated with members of the CSWG and the Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security network.

OPA deepened relationships and developed new ones through attendance at several gatherings, including PeaceCon 2019 in Washington, DC; the Notre Dame Keough School of Global Affairs' "Religion Beyond Memes" symposium, also in Washington; the Men & the #MeToo Movement conference at the University of Pennsylvania; and "From MeToo to WeToo" workshops facilitated by Gender Equity and Reconciliation International at the BIC offices in New York City. OPA participated in several discussions related to the intersection of religious freedom and gender equality.

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PA participates actively in the US Climate Action Network, the Washington Interreligious Staff Community Working Group on Energy & Ecology, and the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative, as well as maintaining a presence in spaces organized by the **Environmental Protection** Agency, Interfaith Power & Light, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

In 2019, OPA further systematized its efforts to participate in the discourse on economic inequality, coordinated by its economic justice discourse officer. Relationships with several national economic policy and research organizations in Washington, DC, were developed through invitations to a quarterly discussion space convened by OPA. A concept note describing the potential for a distinctive conversation transcending ideological framings and a narrow focus on technical solutions was shared with over 30 contributors to the discourse. Along with subsequent one-on-one conversations, this led to the convening of a quarterly economic inequality discussion space beginning in February. Initial conversations revealed a particular interest in further exploring the moral dimensions of inequality and the possibilities for advancing the discussion of moral principles and values in the discourse on economic inequality.

OPA's continuing efforts to identify spaces for constructive engagement in this area was aided by attendance at several national conferences, including the Economic Policy Institute's EARN conference in Pittsburgh, the Racial Equitable Community Development symposium in Baltimore, and numerous Washington, DC, events including EconCon 2020 and the Just Economy conference. A few of the meaningful conversations in these spaces were captured in a short interview series on economic inequality for the debut of OPA's Illumine America podcast. This series focuses on organizations seeking to create conditions for constructive dialogue on economic inequality, including fostering consultation among diverse actors and experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, avoiding economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected by the policies and actions under discussion.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The sustainable development portfolio has progressed along a

number of environment-related lines of action, including climate change, climate finance, sustainable consumption, and consumerism through the efforts of OPA's representative for sustainable development.

OPA participates actively in the US Climate Action Network, the Washington Interreligious Staff Community Working Group on Energy & Ecology, and the Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative, as well as maintaining a presence in spaces organized by the Environmental Protection Agency, Interfaith Power & Light, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

OPA has maintained a presence in Washington, DC-area spaces and events hosted by the Wilson Center, the Security and Sustainability Forum, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and EcoAmerica. Engagement and participation in this broad range of spaces and networks has allowed OPA to map current developments in the broader national discourse.

The sustainable development representative has acted to deepen relationships by taking part in conversations about consumption from a faith-based perspective, in hopes of instituting a discussion space about this and related concepts.

Coordination of ISGP seminars

he Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) is a nonprofit research and educational organization. At the heart of the Institute's work is an exploration of how science and religion, conceived of as two complementary systems of knowledge and practice, can be drawn on to achieve positive and enduring change for the betterment of the world. In the context of its mission—to create spaces in which individuals and groups concerned with social transformation can come together to explore the elements of a framework for thought and action that is inspired by both science and religion—ISGP offers seminars for university undergraduates, graduate students, and young professionals. In the United States, the National Spiritual Assembly has made it possible to offer these seminars at Bahá'í schools and at other facilities across the country.

Seminars for undergraduate students

The purpose of the ISGP seminars for undergraduates is to raise the consciousness of youth about the importance of engaging in action and discourse directed towards social change; to develop their capacity to reflect, to analyze, and to learn from action; to explore elements of a conceptual framework for contributing to the advancement of civilization; to provide them with tools to understand and analyze the culture in which they are immersed as well as the content of the university courses they are studying; to help them assume ownership of their education; and to assist them in their efforts to acquire the kind of knowledge that will enable them to live fruitful, productive, and meaningful lives.

Participants in these seminars have described their experience in the following ways:

"I used to feel afraid and nervous to tell people what kinds of activities I was do-



ing because I felt like I would be judged. But the responses I have received are quite contrary to what I had previously believed. People are interested in the world and how to make a difference in it, especially college students. They are eager to know some of the ways in which they can contribute in their communities. The seminars are helping me to organically integrate what I am involved in and the vision of a better world into my conversations on campus."

Year 2 participant, Bosch Summer Seminar

"I've never really felt connected to the Bahá'í Faith until this summer, and the seminar helped to really solidify my thoughts and feelings. I started to act more like a Bahá'í should act without having to try very hard to filter myself. I know a movement is happening in me because I now want to go home and start activities."

-Year 1 participant, Bosch Summer Seminar

"My viewpoint of my goal in life has developed from a simple 'I just want to make the world a better place' to being able to describe precisely that we can do so systematically on an individual and community level. I believe with this deepened knowledge I will be able to more effectively and logically explain to my friends, most of whom are not Bahá'ís, the importance of the institute process and the aims of our Faith."

 Year 3 participant, Bosch Summer Seminar "Yy viewpoint of my goal in life has developed from a simple 'I just want to make the world a better place' to being able to describe precisely that we can do so systematically on an individual and community level."

The ISGP seminars for university students consist of a four-year program of annual 10-day seminars for Bahá'í undergraduate students. During 2019–20, all four years of the program continued to be offered at four locations in the United States.



"I've grown in my capacity to see the complementarity in various aspects of life. For instance, reflecting on my education within the context of how it will aid me to be more effective in serving in my community. One concept we explored with regard to our academic environment was how assimilating knowledge and information is prized over actually understanding the concepts and implications in the way we think, act, and behave. I realized this is exactly how 1 have been approaching my studies and 1 am now consciously thinking of practical ways I can overcome this habit when I go back home".

> -Year 2 participant, Four Corners Seminar

The ISGP seminars for university students consist of a four-year program of annual 10-day seminars for Bahá'í undergraduate students. During

2019–20, all four years of the program continued to be offered at each of the following locations in the United States:

- Bosch Bahá'í School in Santa Cruz, California
- Green Acre Bahá'í School in Eliot, Maine
- Magdalene Carney Bahá'í Institute in West Palm Beach, Florida
- Desert Rose Bahá'í Institute in Eloy, Arizona

The Institute's seminar for university graduates was offered July 12–23 at the Louhelen Bahá'í School in Davison, Michigan, with 56 participants.

Participation in ISGP undergraduate seminars • For administrative year 2019–2020

Session	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
Magdalene Carney, May 31 – June 10	11	9	8	5	33
Bosch summer session, June 16–26	23	23	17	13	76
Green Acre, July 27 – August 6	36	25	29	19	109
Bosch winter session, December 20–30	26	31	10	13	80
Desert Rose, December 26 – January 5	4	5	0	6	15
Total	100	93	64	56	313

Persian Public Information Office

he Persian Public Information Office (PPIO) provides the general public with accurate and up-to-date information about the Bahá'í Faith, particularly with regard to the Faith's origins, aims, history, and current status in Iran. The PPIO also answers a variety of requests for expert advice and assistance from the offices and agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly as well as from the sizable Persian-speaking membership of the Bahá'í community of the United States. The Office is presently composed of three departments:

- Persian Office at the Bahá'í National Center
- Persian Media Productions (PMP)
- Persian Bahá'í Media Service (PBMS)

Each department closely collaborates with the others to provide information about the Bahá'í Faith in a wide variety of forms to the Persian-speaking public and others in the United States and abroad.

PERSIAN OFFICE

The principal objective of the Persian Office is to meet the needs of the offices and agencies of the Bahá'í National Center that pertain to Persian-speaking Bahá'ís. Responding to these needs regularly engages staff in such diverse tasks as preparing the Persian pages of *The American Bahá'í*, translating

correspondence and other documents to and from individual Bahá'ís and various Bahá'í institutions and entities, and providing information to and consulting with various offices of the Bahá'í National Center about the continuing persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran.

The Office also serves the needs of Iranian Bahá'ís in the United States. This includes the integration of recent Iranian Bahá'í immigrants, the provision of academic documentation to Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE) students, and the certification of marriages contracted outside the United States.

During 2019–20, the Office continued efforts to make authorized Persianlanguage Bahá'í publications widely available to Persian speakers across the world.

PERSIAN MEDIA PRODUCTIONS

Launched in October 2011, Persian Media Productions (PMP) produces and distributes Bahá'í-inspired podcasts, television content, and documentary films that address the most pressing issues facing the people of Iran, particularly those pertaining to youth. PMP also builds media-production capacity among young Iranians both in the larger society and in the Bahá'í community.

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MP's accomplishments included producing and broadcasting a podcast series that reviews Iranian cultural norms and behaviors in the light of themes from *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, Book 1 of the Ruhi curriculum.



PMP focused significant effort this year on the themes of social coherence, the importance of virtues in building a healthy society, and the impact of persecution on children and families.

During 2019–20, PMP's accomplishments included:

- Producing and broadcasting a
 <u>podcast series</u> that reviews Iranian
 cultural norms and behaviors in the
 light of themes from *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, Book 1 of the
 Ruhi curriculum.
- Producing and broadcasting a television series, <u>Ayneha-ye Ruberu</u> (Mirrors Facing Each Other), which explores religious and gender prejudices in Iran.
- Creating documentary films on, respectively, the roots of violence against women in Iran and around the world, and untold stories of the Bahá'ís of Iran.
- Raising to more than 56 percent the number of PMP contributors who come from the larger society.
- Increasing PMP's social-media presence. At the time of writing, PMP's Facebook page had achieved more then 95,000 "likes," and PMP Instagram followers reached 5,700, most of them from Iran.



PERSIAN BAHÁ'Í MEDIA SERVICE

Persian Bahá'í Media Service (PBMS) produces programs that support the work of community building in Iran, chiefly by developing content useful for the continuing education of those who are actively interested in the Faith and for those who wish to share it with friends and family.

PBMS broadcasts a 45-minute daily radio program, *Payam-e Doost*, and two weekly hourlong television programs. TV programs are broadcast via Pars TV and Andisheh TV, which are Persian satellite television stations broadcasting to Iran. Programs are also broadcast via ZarinTV, an Afghan Internet TV channel.

PBMS makes 24-hour audio streaming available via satellite to Europe and the Middle East. Listeners around the world access content using a free application on their smart phones, the PBMS website (www.persianbahaimedia.org), or the GLWIZ network. PBMS is also accessible on Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, YouTube, Twitter, and SoundCloud.

During 2019–20, PBMS's achievements included:

- Producing a short documentary, Sedayee Ke Khamoosh Nashod, which features the Mona Foundation's work with schools and educational projects around the world.
- Producing and broadcasting One Shared Identity, One Common Purpose, a documentary based on the Universal House of Justice's 2019 message on the advancement of world peace.





- Producing and broadcasting, for the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, a series of eight radio programs.
- Dubbing the film <u>Dawn of the Light</u> into Persian, in collaboration with the Bahá'í World Center.
- Screening Hope From Iran 2, a
 documentary in which four American
 artists talk about their work,
 women's rights, and the inspiration
 they derive from Ţáhirih's story.
 Screenings of the film were followed
 by panel discussions in several major
 US cities.

The use of audio podcasts to complement shows on the PBMS website and on social media platforms has proven to be very successful. In a recent month, the total number of audio podcast downloads was close to 9,000, with roughly 60 percent of listeners from Iran.

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Treasury

uring 2019–20, the Fund
Development department of
the Office of the Treasurer
conducted education, consultation, and
deepening workshops in its continued
efforts to develop the capacity of
Local Spiritual Assemblies and their
communities, as well as to support
Regional Bahá'í Council treasurers.
These efforts centered on four key
principles of Fund engagement: direct
regular giving, universal participation,
spiritual fundraising, and living a
coherent life.

Forums

As a follow-up to the successful 2018 National Treasurer's Forum, the first Regional Treasurer's Forum was launched in California in February 2020. Local Spiritual Assembly treasurers attended a one-and-a-half day gathering with three tracks of workshops: one for new treasurers, a second for experienced treasurers, and a third for larger communities operating Bahá'í centers. More regional forums are planned over the next three years, with the next National Treasurer's Forum tentatively set for 2023.

Deepenings

Young, Broke & Spiritual deepenings are designed to create occasions for young people to explore together what it means to live a life with spiritual and material resources and priorities in coherence. During 2019–20, the deepenings were offered in various communities. More will be offered as circumstances allow.

Lifeblood deepenings are full- or half-day explorations into Bahá'í writings, with topics including the true nature of wealth, poverty, and sacrifice, as well as guidance related to regular, direct engagement with the lifeblood of the Cause.

The workshop *Elements of Spiritual Fund Raising* was introduced in early 2019. This three-hour interactive workshop is designed to assist the friends in the spiritual and legal aspects of planning, organizing, and implementing fundraising initiatives and events focused on contributing to the National Fund.

Young believers

For several years two young believers' newsletters have been mailed quarterly: one to registered children ages 4–7, and the other to junior youth and youth ages 12–18. These publications are intended to acquaint young believers with virtues associated with giving, and they include stories and updates. In addition, a video series was created for each age group. The *Family Fund Newscast* features an animated host that shares stories and writings with children, and an animated story is sent to junior youth and youth with each issue.

Persian believer outreach

Special effort was made this year to engage Persian-speaking believers in learning about the Funds. Deepening materials were developed and three presentations of the Persian version of the *Lifeblood* deepening program have been given since spring 2019 in several areas of the country.

Webinars

A highly successful series of webinars was introduced to the national community, also starting in spring 2019. Offered weekdays during the lunch hour in three separate time zones, each webinar is presented quarterly. Participants have praised the webinars, whose topics include:

- Online Town Hall
- Universal participation

TREASURY

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Efforts to create an integrated accounting program are underway, as is a project to offer an OCS app to replace the current mobile-giving link. Surveys and focus groups will be instrumental in the pilot stage of developing the upcoming OCS 2, which may be launched later this year.

- The spiritual nature of giving
- Wills
- Other planned giving instruments

Special fundraising projects

Fund Development continues to provide fundraising support to the Persian Bahá'í Media Service (PBMS) and to the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland.

Online Contribution System (OCS)

Efforts to create an integrated accounting program are underway, as is a project to offer an OCS app to replace the current mobile-giving link. Surveys and focus groups will be instrumental in the pilot stage of developing the upcoming OCS 2, which may be launched later this year.

Planned Giving

The Planned Giving department continues to educate the Bahá'í community on the value of leaving a material legacy to the Funds of the Faith. Believers are encouraged to deepen their understanding of their spiritual obligation to write a will. Many are inspired to participate in leaving a material legacy to the Faith to further the advance of the Cause of God after their passing. In addition to a spiritual legacy, the act of leaving a material legacy has a profound impact on the soul of the donor.

A new version of the booklet *Writing a Will and Testament* has been created and is to be printed shortly. This will be free to the friends and utilized at Planned Giving workshops.

As this Ridván 2020 Annual Report goes to press, some \$10.9 million was contributed to the National Spiritual Assembly this fiscal year through planned-giving options such as bequests, life insurance, IRAs, 401(k) retirement accounts, securities, annuities, savings, certificates of deposit, and donor-advised funds, which continue to become more popular.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Combined statements of financial position

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles presentation 10 months ended February 29, 2020, and fiscal year ended April 30, 2019

				Combined total			I
National Bahá'í Fund		Publishing Trust		February 2020 unaudited		April 2019 audited	
\$	8,405,798	\$	(3,984)	\$	8,401,814	\$	10,511,900
	10,060,626 1,343,559		(10,060,626) 22,753		0 1,366,312		0 1,663,884
	95,343 261,301		257,047 11,154		352,390 272,455		474,502 93,360
\$	20,166,627	\$	(9,773,655)	\$	10,392,971	\$	12,743,646
\$	47,827,791		0	\$		\$	49,717,951
			0		49,032,501		41,342,510 5,865,233
\$	121,952,010	\$	(9,773,655)	\$		\$	109,669,340
-Lia	bilities and	net	assets——				
\$		\$	·	\$		\$	3,553,576
	14,537,438		0		14,537,438		14,881,592
	666,597		9,792		676,389		565,623
\$	18,340,555	\$	59,715	\$	18,400,269	\$	19,000,791
\$	5,999,376 10,812,716		0	\$	5,999,376 10,812,716		5,019,360 10,812,716
\$	35,152,646	\$	59,715	\$	35,212,361	\$	34,832,867
\$	67,811,050	\$	(9,833,370)	\$	57,977,679	\$	60,075,842
	16,650,275		0		16,650,275		12,303,952
	2,338,039		0		2,338,039		2,456,679
\$	86,799,364	\$	(9,833,370)	\$	76,965,993	\$	74,836,473
\$	121,952,010	\$	(9,773,655)	_	112,178,354		109,669,340
	\$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$ \$	\$ 8,405,798 10,060,626 1,343,559 95,343 261,301 \$ 20,166,627 \$ 47,827,791 49,032,501 4,925,090 \$ 121,952,010 -Liabilities and \$ 3,136,519 14,537,438 666,597 \$ 18,340,555 \$ 5,999,376 10,812,716 \$ 35,152,646 \$ 67,811,050 16,650,275 2,338,039 \$ 86,799,364	\$ 8,405,798 \$ 10,060,626 1,343,559 95,343 261,301 \$ 20,166,627 \$ 47,827,791 49,032,501 4,925,090 \$ 121,952,010 \$ -Liabilities and net \$ 14,537,438 666,597 \$ 18,340,555 \$ \$ 5,999,376 10,812,716 \$ 35,152,646 \$ \$ 67,811,050 16,650,275 2,338,039 \$ 86,799,364 \$	Bahá'í Fund Trust \$ 8,405,798 \$ (3,984) 10,060,626 (10,060,626) 1,343,559 22,753 95,343 257,047 261,301 11,154 \$ 20,166,627 \$ (9,773,655) \$ 47,827,791 0 49,032,501 0 4,925,090 0 \$ 121,952,010 \$ (9,773,655) -Liabilities and net assets \$ 3,136,519 \$ 49,923 14,537,438 0 666,597 9,792 \$ 18,340,555 \$ 59,715 \$ 5,999,376 0 10,812,716 0 \$ 35,152,646 \$ 59,715 \$ 67,811,050 \$ (9,833,370) 16,650,275 0 2,338,039 0 \$ 86,799,364 \$ (9,833,370)	Bahá'í Fund Trust \$ 8,405,798 \$ (3,984) \$ 10,060,626 (10,060,626) \$ 1,343,559 22,753 \$ 95,343 257,047 \$ 261,301 \$ (9,773,655) \$ 47,827,791 0 \$ 49,032,501 0 4,925,090 0 \$ 121,952,010 \$ (9,773,655) \$ 3,136,519 \$ 49,923 \$ 14,537,438 0 666,597 9,792 \$ 18,340,555 \$ 59,715 \$ 5,999,376 0 \$ 10,812,716 0 \$ 35,152,646 \$ 59,715 \$ 67,811,050 \$ (9,833,370) \$ 67,811,050 \$ (9,833,370) \$ 67,838,039 0 \$ 86,799,364 \$ (9,833,370)	National Bahá'í Fund Publishing Trust February 2020 unaudited \$ 8,405,798 \$ (3,984) \$ 8,401,814 10,060,626 (10,060,626) 0 1,343,559 22,753 1,366,312 95,343 257,047 352,390 261,301 11,154 272,455 \$ 20,166,627 \$ (9,773,655) \$ 10,392,971 \$ 47,827,791 0 \$ 47,827,791 \$ 49,032,501 0 49,032,501 \$ 4,925,090 0 \$ 112,178,354 Liabilities and net assets \$ 3,136,519 \$ 49,923 \$ 3,186,442 14,537,438 0 14,537,438 666,597 9,792 676,389 \$ 18,340,555 \$ 59,715 \$ 18,400,269 \$ 5,999,376 0 \$ 5,999,376 10,812,716 0 10,812,716 \$ 35,152,646 \$ 59,715 \$ 35,212,361 \$ 67,811,050 \$ (9,833,370) \$ 57,977,679 16,650,275 0 16,650,275 2,338,039 0	National Bahá'í Fund Publishing Trust February 2020 unaudited April Ap

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

Combined statements of activities

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles presentation

10 months ended February 29, 2020, and fiscal year ended April 30, 2019

			Combined total			
	National Bahá'í Fund	Publishing Trust	February 2020 unaudited	April 2019 audited		
Changes in unrestricted net assets						
Revenues						
Contributions	\$ 27,078,470	\$ 0	\$ 27,078,470	\$ 34,890,332		
Bahá'í school tuition	866,143	0	866,143	759,666		
Sale of books and materials	193,424	583,764	777,187	1,093,812		
Investment and other income	2,785,356	210,459	2,995,815	1,999,994		
Investment gain (loss)	(78,085)	0	(78,085)	213,298		
Assets released from restriction	2,575,781	0	2,575,781	8,551,022		
Total revenues	\$ 33,421,089	\$ 794,223	\$ 34,215,312	\$ 47,508,124		
Expenses						
Contributions to other Funds	\$ 2,648,589	\$ 0	\$ 2,648,589	\$ 3,953,260		
Education and teaching activities	12,866,794	363,393	13,230,187	14,228,170		
Properties operations and maintenance	2,807,876	. 0	2,807,876	3,281,003		
Cost of books and special materials	652,334	0	652,334	906,747		
Publishing and communications	1,275,493	181,696	1,457,189	3,036,132		
Defense of the Faith and public information	1,659,487	0	1,659,487	3,143,598		
Community services provided by the National Assembly	2,308,372	0	2,308,372	3,089,629		
Required spending (legal, taxes, interest, etc.)	1,052,014	0	1,052,014	958,845		
Change in Defined Benefit Plan	2,400,000	0	2,400,000	1,695,927		
Depreciation	3,748,651	0	3,748,651	4,427,947		
General administration	1,787,165	0	1,787,165	1,875,247		
Information technology	1,511,787	0	1,511,787	2,607,105		
Total expenses	\$ 34,718,562	\$ 545,089	\$35,263,651	\$ 43,203,610		
Changes in net assets before pension adjustment	\$ (1,297,473)	\$ 249,134	\$(1,048,339)	\$ 4,304,514		
Pension changes other than net periodic benefit cost	\$ 2,400,000	0	\$ 2,400,000	\$ 1,695,927		
Increase/(decrease) in net assets	\$ (3,697,473)	\$ 249,134	\$(3,448,339)	\$ 2,608,587		
Changes in temporarily restricted net assets						
Contributions	\$ 8,406,867	\$ 0	\$ 8,406,867	\$ 8,472,333		
Net assets released from restriction	(2,575,781)	(221,864)	(2,797,645)	(8,875,171)		
Increase/(decrease) in temporarily restricted net assets	\$ 5,831,086	\$ (221,864)	\$ 5,609,222	\$ (402,838)		
Changes in permanently restricted net assets						
Unrealized gain on Perpetual Trust	0	0	0	\$ 44,028		
Changes in permanently restricted assets	(31,363)	0	(31,363)	247,959		
Increase/(decrease) in permanently restricted net assets	\$ (31,363)	0	\$ (31,363)	\$ 291,987		
Increase/(decrease) in net assets	\$ 2,102,250	\$ 27,270	\$ 2,129,520	\$ 2,497,736		
Net assets, beginning of year	\$ 84,697,113	\$ (9,860,640)	\$ 74,836,473	\$ 72,338,737		
Net assets, end of year	\$ 86,799,363	\$ (9,833,370)	\$ 76,965,993	\$ 74,836,473		
				<u> </u>		

Notes to financial statements February 29, 2020, and April 30, 2019

Operations and accounting policies

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States (the Assembly) was established in 1927 as a voluntary trust and subsequently incorporated in October 1994 as an Illinois not-for-profit corporation to administer, teach, and further the Bahá'í Faith in the United States.

The accounts of the Assembly are maintained on the accrual basis. The financial statements of the Assembly include the assets, liabilities, net assets (deficits), and financial activities of the National Bahá'í Fund and the Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

The principal accounting policies used by the Assembly are as follows:

Contributions

All contributions from members of the Faith, unless specifically restricted by the donor, are considered to be available for unrestricted use and are recorded as received. Items received of artistic or religious significance for which no value can be readily determined and which are not anticipated to be sold are recorded at nominal value. Contributions also include bequests which are recorded as received.

Contributions from nonmembers may not be used to support the Faith and, accordingly, such amounts received are distributed for other humanitarian causes. Contributions restricted by the donor for particular programs and projects, or for property and equipment acquisitions, are earned and reported as revenues when the Assembly has incurred expenses for the purpose specified by the donor. Such amounts received, but not yet earned, are reported as restricted deferred amounts.

Tax-exempt status

The US Treasury Department has held that the National Spiritual Assembly and all subordinate Local Spiritual Assemblies are exempt from Federal income tax as organizations described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) of 1986. Accordingly, contributions made to the National Spiritual Assembly and all of its subordinate Local Spiritual Assemblies are deductible by the donors for Federal income tax purposes as provided by IRC Section 170.

Bequests, legacies, devises, transfers, or gifts to the National Spiritual Assembly or its subordinate Local Assemblies are deductible for Federal estate and gift tax purposes as provided by IRC Sections 2055, 2106, and 2522.

Inventories

Inventories of books and special materials are recorded at the lower of cost, using the average cost method, or market.

Investments

Investments are recorded at market value.

Property and equipment

Property and equipment are stated at cost. The Assembly computes depreciation of fixed assets over their estimated useful lives using the straight line method. The estimated lives used in computing depreciation are as follows:

Asset description	Asset life
Furniture/Equipment	3-10 years
Buildings/Improvements	5-40 years
Bahá'í House of Worship	75 years



Junior youth program learning sites

earning sites for the junior youth spiritual empowerment program continued to focus on gaining insight into the movement of populations toward the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and how the program contributes to that movement. Some areas of focus during 2019-20 included efforts to intensify growth of the program, and of the communitybuilding process generally, within local populations; rich learning about junior youth and youth camps; fruits of extending the conversation to parents and families of junior youth; and continued support for young people who have "graduated" from the junior youth program in many areas of life, even as they move into the main sequence of institute courses to further build their capacity for service.

The Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Center oversees a global network of sites for generating and disseminating learning about the junior youth program. A North American office works with sites in the United States and Canada, each of which is networked with clusters in nearby regions. This past year, learning sites were based in these US clusters:

- Dallas, Texas, whose network includes clusters in the South Central and Prairie States regions
- East Valley (south suburban Phoenix), Arizona, working with clusters in the Four Corners States region.
- San Diego, California, with a network within the state.
- **Triangle** (Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area), North Carolina, whose network reaches into the Appalachian, Atlantic, and Northeastern States regions.

In addition, learning sites in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Toronto, Ontario, work with some clusters in the United States. The learning sites' resource persons, the Regional Training Institutes, junior youth program coordinators, and other collaborators are helping advance the gathering and sharing of learning through many methods: regional and cluster-level occasions for learning and reflection, accompaniment of coordinators and animators in clusters, and participation in teaching projects and in youth and junior youth camps. The following narrative presents a summary of some of the learning over the past year.

Intensifying growth of the program and the community-building process

In continuing efforts to learn about the requirements of growth, the East Valley site has focused energy on a few neighborhoods to learn what it takes to engage as many as 200 junior youths in the program and 100 youths in institute courses within a single population, even as it continues to support development of processes across the cluster. The San Diego site, pursuing a goal of 300 participants overall, is working with coordinators and animators to increase the size of each group to as many as 10 junior youths studying weekly with animators. In the Triangle, a cluster that already has more than 200 junior youth participants, youth outreaches have expanded in two dimensions: Fully four neighborhoods this winter witnessed institute campaigns to attract young people to be trained as animators and children's class teachers; and the resulting training and service has helped to increase all the core activities there.

Regular junior youth camps

Junior youth camps afford opportunities for participants to study intensively, develop their creativity, and build friendships with a larger group of peers, and for youths in the institute courses to gain experience in animating, accompanying, planning, and reflecting. The Triangle cluster has decentralized its camps to operate in three localities to meet

COMMUNITY BUILDING

Junior youth program learning sites	93
Learning Desk	95
National Statistics Office	97
Office of International Pioneering	99
Social Action Desk	100

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All the learning site clusters have seen systematic efforts to include parents of group participants in the conversation on community building.



specific needs in each place. In Dallas, the rhythm of summer and winter camps is so well established that junior youths now look forward to them at school breaks. In San Diego, regular camps are established in the city's two neighborhoods with the most-advanced activity, alongside regular reflection gatherings for animators serving across the cluster.

Working with parents and families

All the learning site clusters have seen systematic efforts to include parents of group participants in the conversation on community building. In San Diego and Dallas, the junior youth groups' prayer practices, as well as conversations between animators and parents about the devotional life of the community, have encouraged a number of those families to host regular devotional gatherings. The Dallas site additionally reports that parents and others in the larger community have been invited to "text study days" to become familiar with the junior youth texts, and response has been enthusiastic. The East Valley site notes parents are increasingly arising as protagonists in a community's transformation, often encouraging other families to get involved; one youth commented, "The Ruhi Institute has

changed my mom's life so much and she's never even studied it; just through conversations with me and seeing how I've changed . . . has affected her."

Support for participants beyond junior youth age

As participants reach age 15, many are opting to continue their spiritual education through the main sequence of institute courses and to arise in service. The Dallas site reports a growing number of junior youth program graduates taking part in study circles and intensive trainings, going on to animate junior youth groups, teach children's classes, and assist in coordination of day camps. The youths often can use further support in this path of service, and the East Valley site reports valuable learning through the offering of weekly study spaces and continued building of relationships with youth and their families—all contributing to the weaving together of a new model of community life. In the Triangle, two young participants in its summer institute campaigns are now serving full time.

Other areas of learning

The Triangle site drew on knowledge from other parts of the world. A delegation visited the Sydney, Australia, cluster, and subsequently shared its learning through a seminar organized by the Continental Board of Counselors involving visitors from the Southeastern and Northwestern regions. The site also played host to visitors from Toronto and from the Australasian network office.

The East Valley site reports that a growing network of friends is learning about working with Native American populations, with regular study and reflection spaces focusing on expanding the junior youth program in areas of the Navajo Nation.

Learning Desk

he National Spiritual Assembly established the Learning Desk in October 2013 to assist it in systematically following progress across the country in pursuit of the objectives of the Five Year Plan, and to aid it in supporting and strengthening learning about expansion and consolidation at the national and regional levels.

As the Universal House of Justice describes the matter in its message of December 29, 2015:

The need to stay well informed about the community's accumulating experience holds particular implications for National Assemblies in larger countries that have several Regional Councils, notably so when the Assembly has devolved to Councils the work of administering the institute. Here, new arrangements at the national level have sometimes been necessary to provide the Assembly with cogent analysis of what is being learned across all regions.

During 2019–20, the Desk continued to organize its work around three primary objectives:

- Helping to ensure the National Spiritual Assembly has a national perspective on expansion and consolidation efforts in progress across the country.
- Contributing to the enhancement of a national learning process in which experience and insights can be shared across regions.
- Offering what the Desk is seeing across the country as an assistance to the efforts of other offices at the Bahá'í National Center.

To aid the Desk in accomplishing the first objective, staff members travel throughout the country, joining in a variety of meetings and activities and conversing with the friends who are actively carrying the work out at regional, cluster, and neighborhood levels. These experiences and conversations in the field ultimately lead to written descriptions and reports presented to the National

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Assembly, often drawing on descriptions that the friends serving the regions and clusters have themselves prepared.

During 2019–20, the Learning Desk traveled in all 12 regions. Staff members visited numerous clusters; attended institute and other gatherings on the regional level to understand the strengths of each region and issues they are facing; and took part in an institutional meeting for North America in Houston called by the Continental Board of Counselors.

These experiences have equipped the Desk to prepare the following reports for the National Assembly during the past year, often in collaboration with others:

- Two cycle reports, providing brief updates every six months on progress toward Plan objectives
- A brief look at the flow of material resources to, and at the grass roots of, the teaching work
- A look at the state of Regional Training Institutes in North America and

- at the support that resource persons provide to them
- Summaries of two gatherings held for training institute resource persons
- A look at various efforts made over the summer of 2019

Appointment of resource persons for the Regional Training Institutes was a new development this past year. The Learning Desk assisted in creating a weeklong orientation for them, as well as a three-day reflection six months later. The Desk also provided logistical support for these occasions as needed.

In collaboration with other offices of the National Spiritual Assembly, the Desk:

- Worked with the Bahá'í Publishing Trust on the printing and distribution of simple prayer books and *The Hidden Words* in Kinyarwanda and Swahili, supporting activities involving US populations speaking these languages.
- Continued regular conversations with *The American Bahá'i* staff and contributed an article on various efforts made across the country during the summer of 2019 for the journal's November/December 2019 issue.
- Participated in the team working with the social media outreach and teaching project in North Carolina's Triangle cluster.
- Collaborated with the Membership and Records office on updates being made to the structure of the UnityWeb membership database, reflecting the increasing diversity of the US Bahá'í community.

National Statistics Office

uring the year ending Ridván 2020, Bahá'í agencies and institutions in the United States received a gift from the Universal House of Justice: the release of a newly designed online version of the Statistical Report Program (SRP), the next step from the desktop version utilized since April 2007. Development of the new online version was overseen by the Department of Statistics at the Bahá'í World Center under the direction and guidance of a policy committee of the Universal House of Justice. As of November 2019, the National Statistics Office manages the system within the United States on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Significance of the new online version of SRP

As the first country in the world to receive the new online application, the US community is learning much from its use. At the cluster level, Area Teaching Committees (ATCs), institute coordinators, Auxiliary Board members, and in some localities Spiritual Assemblies simultaneously utilize the application to report progress. In clusters with intensive activity, the ATC and institute coordinators collaborate closely to enter information using shared resources. In clusters at an early stage of growth, where a full scheme of coordination is not yet in place, often an Auxiliary Board member or assistant collects pertinent information and either directly enters the information or works with the regional statistics officer for that purpose.

For SRP to be effective in support of planning and analysis, reliable information is critical to the developing of an accurate picture of current conditions that can be studied. Regional Bahá'í Councils play a vital role in supporting the flow of information by extending the necessary resources to agencies serving the clusters. The national statistics officer works with the Councils and their appointed regional statistics officers to

raise capacity and to cultivate and circulate learning across the country to serve all levels.

Testing within the US leads to expansion into other countries

Based on regular usage of SRP and insights gained by users at all levels, the National Statistics Office shares observations about the system's operation with the Department of Statistics at the World Center, with an aim to strengthen the system's capacity. Three months into use of the system within the United States, the Department of Statistics extended the application to two additional countries, with plans to expand utilization across more countries as appropriate.

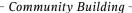
A high degree of security governs access to SRP at each level of use, not only in the technical authentication process but also in the approval of individual users, who are cleared by the national statistics officer and the respective Regional Council secretary. Training on use of the system is facilitated by regional and national statistics officers.

SRP helps to expand the vision of what can be achieved

Use of SRP has risen dramatically since the launch of the online version in the United States. The system has well over 1,100 users, most of them at the cluster level. Because of this growing use of the application, the vision of what can be achieved is expanding, as foretold in a 2016 document from the Department of Statistics at the Bahá'í World Center:

The Universal House of Justice has provided guidance over the years about the gathering of accurate statistics and the careful analysis of this information as a fundamental aspect of the work of agencies at the cluster level in their efforts to ensure the steady progress of a programme of growth. . . . A fundamental element of such

t the cluster level, Area Teaching Committees (ATCs), institute coordinators, Auxiliary Board members, and in some localities Spiritual Assemblies simultaneously utilize the online SRP to report progress. In clusters with intensive activity, the ATC and institute coordinators collaborate closely to enter information using shared resources. In clusters at an early stage of growth, where a full scheme of coordination is not yet in place, often an Auxiliary Board member or assistant collects pertinent information and either directly enters the information or works with the regional statistics officer for that purpose.



ctivity reported in the biannual survey reflects strengthening of our community's capacity, associated with efforts made to invite friends to observe celebrations of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb with us. Twice-a-year reporting has now become systematic for reporting progress at the regional level.

an approach is developing the capacity to collect statistical data and utilize this information to expand the vision of what can be achieved in the cluster and make decisions that will facilitate its development.

Increasingly, inter-institutional gatherings extract and use data from SRP for planning and analysis at a regional level. Clusters are learning to systematically collect and analyze statistics to support the planning and reflection process.

Other services of the National Statistics Office

As of October 31, 2019, it was reported through the biannual survey, which uses data drawn from SRP, that the number of devotional gatherings had increased dramatically from 3,800 a year earlier to nearly 7,000, marking an 85 percent rise; the overall number of participants increased by 56 percent and participation of friends of the Faith by 76 percent (see National Statistics Overview, pages 16-17). This reflects strengthening of our community's capacity, associated with efforts made to invite friends to observe celebrations of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb with us. Twice-a-year reporting has now become systematic for reporting progress at the regional level.

The Social and Economic Development survey continues annually, as requested by the Universal House of Justice. Each year, growing cohorts of individual believers and institutions are organizing activities and collaborating with like-minded friends, in particular to address issues of racism and social justice.

To learn more, contact the National Statistics Officer (at MSO@usbnc.org).

Office of International Pioneering

or more than a century, the Bahá'ís of North America were at the forefront of the worldwide spread of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. From those who earned imperishable fame as "Knights of Bahá'u'lláh" during the beloved Guardian's Ten Year World Crusade to the thousands of believers who left their homes during other decades and other Plans to pioneer abroad, the American Bahá'i community admirably and selflessly answered the Master's call to carry the unifying message of Bahá'u'lláh to the far corners of the earth.

While more than 1,300 American Bahá'ís still serve in this manner, the Office of International Pioneering, in response to recent guidance from the Universal House of Justice, is in a state of transition. In a letter dated March 26, 2016, the Supreme Body made it clear that while past contributions of North American believers to the spread of the Faith in the world cannot be underestimated, "[t]he tasks confronting [the friends in North America] are not identical with those of an earlier age. With the international spread of the Faith largely con-

cluded, demands on you are now most pressing on the home front."

The House of Justice has not, therefore, assigned any international pioneering goals to the American Bahá'í community. Furthermore, the National Spiritual Assembly, in a message dated April 20, 2018, issued a call for 600–700 homefront pioneers who can contribute to the national goal of achieving 625 intensive programs of growth by Riḍván 2021.

Notwithstanding these developments, the friends who express a desire to live and serve overseas are free to pursue any opportunities that may be open to them, based on their language abilities, professional skills, or personal contacts. On the National Spiritual Assembly's behalf, the national Secretariat offers support by directing these friends to service opportunities outside the country known to the Assembly, by introducing overseas pioneers to the national communities to which they are traveling, and by serving as a point of contact for friends who have left this community to contribute to the international spread of the Faith.

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Social Action Desk

The Desk's observations have convinced it that social action is naturally stirring in neighborhoods where the institute process is embedded deeply enough to transform individuals and communities. Often, social action emerges as a result of the work of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program.

he work of the Social Action Desk is informed by a 2012 document on Social Action released by the Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED) at the Bahá'í World Center. Among learning objectives identified in that document are "how the first stirrings of social action will manifest themselves" in clusters with a robust expansion and consolidation process, "the extent to which cultivation and direction from the institutions will be required," and how social action efforts "will strengthen the fabric of community life."

Since its establishment in 2010, the Desk's work has fallen primarily into three areas:

- Raising consciousness about the nature of the Bahá'í community's involvement in social action.
- Building capacity at the cluster level to systematically learn about this area of activity.
- Ascertaining the conditions and elements associated with the timely emergence of sustained social action initiatives and programs.

During 2019–20, the Desk focused mainly on observing and describing the ways in which the Bahá'í community engages in social action across the country. The following is an overview of common findings.

Affinity with the institute process

The Desk's observations have convinced it that social action is naturally stirring in neighborhoods where the institute process is embedded deeply enough to transform individuals and communities. Often, social action emerges as a result of the work of the junior youth spiritual

empowerment program. Junior youth frequently respond to the learning engendered by the program by initiating neighborhood projects to better the physical environment, establish lending libraries, or create awareness campaigns. Many animators and children's class teachers have also naturally stepped into the area of social action by helping younger people with homework, and youth are learning to address their own financial needs so that their service and their professional aspirations can advance side by side. Study circles have



served as supportive environments where relationships of trust allow participants to become aware of each other's real concerns for the progress of the community. Modest efforts emerge from a group's consultation, and on occasion a Local Spiritual Assembly has supported emerging plans for action.

Through continuing conversations among friends in devotional gatherings, home visits, and family retreats, aspirations are shared. Without the patronizing attitude of one group doing something for the benefit of another, friends labor together to realize their common hopes. For example, home visits among a few newly arrived immigrants led to occasions for English



conversation; a devotional among families led to participants forming a committee that coordinates care and support in difficult times; at a family retreat, the parents of children and junior youth helped each other in navigating the public school system.

Individual initiative and coherence

In their workplaces and professional associations, Bahá'ís across the country are seeking to apply the insights of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation to many dimensions of social existence. Individual Bahá'ís are contributing to the development of programs, often modest in scale, that glean insights from the Bahá'í teachings in their methodology, approach, or instruments. There are also sustained projects and a few Bahá'í-inspired organizations that have been initiated by individual Bahá'ís related to education, theater, health, agriculture, workplace development, and the advancement of youth, among others.

Coherence is being achieved to an increasingly higher degree as friends intentionally draw on elements of the conceptual framework they are familiar with from the field of expansion and consolidation, and apply these elements to projects, programs, and organizations whose aim is to assist communities as they trace their own path toward material and social progress.

Integration into patterns of action

While social action can stir at the grass roots in clusters at the first milestone of growth, or at the initiative of individual believers wherever they may reside, it tends to become a more prominent feature of a cluster's pattern of action "once human resources in a cluster are in sufficient abundance, and the pattern of growth firmly established," as the Universal House of Justice has written.

The Desk anticipates gathering further insights into how social action reinforces the community-building work as an expanding nucleus of friends engages with more and more of the inhabitants of particular neighborhoods and localities. In the coming year, the Desk will continue to observe and describe social-action efforts in the context of expansion and consolidation, with the hope of seeing these two areas of Bahá'í activity becoming, in the words of the Universal House of Justice, "interactive and mutually propelling."



Friends labor together to realize their common hopes. For example, home visits among a few newly arrived immigrants led to occasions for English conversation; a devotional among families led to participants forming a committee that coordinates care and support in difficult times; at a family retreat, the parents of children and junior youth helped each other in navigating the public school system.



Office of Assembly Development

he Office of Assembly
Development accompanies
Local Spiritual Assemblies as
they strive to build vibrant, spiritually
healthy communities in partnership
with other Bahá'í institutions and
agencies. The Office seeks to build
Assemblies' capacity for service
through:

- Gatherings at which participants consult in light of authoritative guidance and share learning from their communities.
- Distribution of <u>Emerging Insights</u>, a publication aimed at sharing understandings Assemblies gain as they strive to translate guidance into action.
- Collaboration and consultation with other offices and agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly.

In this final regard, the Office works shoulder to shoulder with the Office of Community Administration, which enriches staff members' understandings of the challenges Spiritual Assemblies face and propels them to greater heights in their service.

Special Visits

The National Assembly regularly invites local Assemblies to the National Center to consult, to become better acquainted with available resources, and to pray in the House of Worship. As Assembly members spend time together, they deepen their understandings of the nature of Spiritual Assemblies, of the relationships Assemblies foster with individuals and the community, and of consultation as the collective investigation of reality. During 2019-20, these Special Visits in March and July attracted 67 participants from nine Assemblies. After the visits, participants commented:

- "Having broader perspectives raises our vision. We will be more purposeful in referring to the guidance and move forward with love."
- "We now have a better understanding of the Plan."
- "This was transformative for our Assembly, 1 believe."

Regional and cluster gatherings

The Office of Assembly Development and Office of Community Administration collaborated with Auxiliary Boards serving Illinois, Minnesota, Texas, and Georgia and the respective Regional Bahá'í Councils of the Southeastern and South Central States to host 13 weekend gatherings, which attracted almost 400 participants. These gatherings helped all participants, including those from the Office, learn about the role of Assemblies in fostering spiritual health in light of the Five Year Plan, and their intimate link to the work of the Plan and its growth processes. Visitors noted:

- "The topics discussed were very relevant to the challenges our community is facing."
- "The items we studied have left me inspired, motivated, and empowered to contribute the new ideas I heard today at our next Assembly meeting."

Emerging Insights

During 2019, the Office released the third issue of *Emerging Insights*— "Judicious Appointment of Committees." This publication, available for download from the Bahá'í member services website, shares learning Assemblies garner through their work to build vibrant communities.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Office of Community
Administration 105

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o help Assemblies prepare for acting as Unit Convention hosts, the Office made available for download from the Unit Convention page of the member services website newly revised planning materials, electoral unit maps, and two educational videos-"Bahá'í Electoral Process" and "Spiritual Significance of Unit Convention." For the first time, the Office hosted two webinars for planning teams.

Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies

In consultation with the Office of Community Administration, the Office continued updating *Guidelines for Local Spiritual Assemblies*, which helps Assembly members carry out their work in light of the most current guidance. The Office updated seven chapters with new guidance, and, with a mobile app expected to go live in 2020, friends will be able to access this resource on tablets and mobile electronic devices.

Survey on flow of guidance

The Office is investigating how Assemblies can determine how they are advancing in their capacity to nurture individuals and communities with a direct flow of guidance-a flow that strengthens the community's roots in the Covenant and, as a result, increases their participation in community life. As a first step this year, the Office collaborated with the National Statistics Office to include a few questions in the Bicentenary Survey. The goal was to learn more about how Spiritual Assemblies tend to their duty to be a channel for the flow of guidance to the community and to individuals. Of the 575 Assemblies responding, nearly 90 percent indicated that they distributed guidance from the Universal House of Justice and the National Assembly about the bicentenary. About 80 percent took steps to ensure that the friends received the guidance and were encouraged to extend their conversations to the "widest cross section

of society." About half of these Assemblies created spaces to deepen the friends' understanding of the significance of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb (see table below). Corresponding questions to individuals showed that 1,651 individuals studied messages from the Universal House of Justice, and 1,457 studied related messages from the National Assembly.

Electoral Unit Conventions

The Office of Assembly Development streamlined the organization of Unit Conventions, which elect delegates to the US Bahá'í National Convention. Spiritual Assemblies recommended by Regional Bahá'í Councils are appointed to organize and conduct conventions for their respective electoral units. To help Assemblies prepare for these duties, the Office made available for download from the Unit Convention page of the member services website newly revised planning materials, electoral unit maps, and two educational videos-"Bahá'í Electoral Process" and "Spiritual Significance of Unit Convention." For the first time, the Office hosted two webinars for planning teams. It also distributed policy amendments related to tied votes among minorities and the expansion of absentee balloting to include-under certain conditionselectronic communications.

The newly created Unit Convention Desk (unitconvention@usbnc.org) will manage the delegate election process nationwide.

How Assemblies facilitated the flow of information about bicentenary guidance Results from 575 responding Local Spiritual Assemblies

499	Distributed guidance from the Universal House of Justice and the National Spiritual Assembly about the bicentenary
459	Took steps to ensure that the Bahá'ís received this guidance
446	Encouraged the friends in the community to extend their circle of conversations to the widest cross-section of society
414	Distribution of invitations included those within the larger community who participated in community activities
335	Took the opportunity of the previous bicentenary celebration to strengthen local community-building efforts
272	Created spaces to deepen the friends' understanding of the significance of the bicentenary
197	Is tracking data about how the community is progressing in making individual plans to commemorate the Birth of the Báb
14	None of the above

Source: 2019 National Spiritual Assembly Bicentenary Survey

Office of Community Administration

he Office of Community
Administration handles a
wide variety of administrative
matters, with its primary work on
behalf of the National Spiritual
Assembly falling into two broad areas:
the administration of Bahá'í law and
the effort to learn, alongside Bahá'ís
and their institutions, how to foster
individual and collective spiritual
health.

The daily administrative work of the Office requires interacting with believers and Local Spiritual Assemblies to gather information, then compiling and summarizing the information for the National Assembly's review. In carrying out this work during 2019–20, the Office presented 98 agenda items for National Assembly meetings. Among these were:

- 23 instances in which the removal of an individual's membership privileges was considered, and 13 instances in which membership privileges were restored.
- Requests for exceptions to the law of parental consent for marriage or exemptions from administrative service.
- Appeals regarding the functioning of Local Spiritual Assemblies.
- Special items for the National Assembly's consideration on policy questions and other focused topics.

Once the National Assembly makes decisions on these matters, the Office of Community Administration is responsible for implementing them through collaboration with national, regional, and local agencies.

The Office engages in a significant volume of correspondence on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly. The past year saw over 1,500 written responses from the Office to individuals and agencies, across the country and internationally.

The Office continued to strengthen its collaboration with other agencies and institutions, particularly on the question of fostering spiritual health. Its key collaborator is the Office of Assembly Development (OAD), with which Community Administration continues to study, consult, and reflect regularly on educational opportunities for the development of local institutions. Community Administration fully supported OAD's coordination of two weekend Special Visit gatherings, each of which brings together a number of Local Spiritual Assemblies from across the country.

The two offices also consulted on the development and continued updating of the manual <u>Guidelines for Local Spiritual</u> <u>Assemblies.</u>

The two offices collaborated closely with Auxiliary Board members and two Regional Councils in the coordination of subregional gatherings of Assemblies in the Heartland, South Central, and Southeastern regions. These 13 gatherings represented opportunities to learn about creating effective spaces for the friends to increase understanding of the role of the institutions in fostering the spiritual health of the community, and how that role is intimately tied to engagement in the work of the Five Year Plan. Materials were developed for, and tested in, these few initial gatherings. Both offices anticipate that efforts of this nature will continue into the next vear and that much more will be learned as experience increases.

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Office of Education and Schools

hroughout the year 2019–20, the Office of Education and Schools (OES) continued to gain a richer understanding of its role as a progenitor of Bahá'í learning uniquely contributing to the advancement of the current Five Year Plan through the creation and guidance of programs offered at its three permanent schools, its 24 seasonal schools, and the Wilmette Institute.

The OES also assisted in the emergence of the Native American Bahá'í Institute (NABI) as an independent entity now under the direct management of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Background

In efforts to take stock of its situation that began with the current Plan's inception, the OES has taken time, in the words of the Universal House of Justice, to "survey from a broad perspective its challenges and possibilities." This has inspired a continuing analysis of the strength of the Office's contributions to the community-building work taking place in clusters and neighborhoods across the country. Among questions the Office has consistently considered:

- Is the OES working shoulder to shoulder with fellow institutions and with individuals at the forefront of the community-building work?
- Are the Office's programs and pilot projects systematically generating, applying, and disseminating knowledge?
- Is the physical and spiritual environment at each of the schools contributing to a deeper understanding of the verities of the Bahá'í Revelation—with special regard to impressions being made on friends of the Faith?

The OES set out at the beginning of this Plan to welcome to the programs it

offers believers and friends of the Faith with a desire to become protagonists in their own spiritual development and well-being.

Staffing

The schools continue to attract applicants who have appropriate work skills and who demonstrate a commitment to participate in Plan-related activities. In most cases, the process of recruitment has been advanced through existing personal relationships across the Bahá'í community and through current staff's efforts to build strong relationships with participants attending programs during the course of the year (including many who serve the Faith's institutions in various capacities).

Youth volunteers

To learn more about how young adults and youth, ages 18-25, can volunteer at one of the permanent schools and later return to their home clusters as valued resources in Plan-related activities, the OES has experimented with transforming the Bahá'í Youth Service Corps (BYSC) model from a year of service given at one school to the "24" program. This program aims to give each volunteer an opportunity to participate in activities outside the confines of the schools by rotating groups of six volunteers (one group for each of the four schools, so that $6 \times 4 = 24$) through all the schools once a cycle for both study and service, accompanied onsite by each school's learning coordinator.

To recruit volunteers, extensive outreach using the national membership database was undertaken by the Bahá'í National Center's Human Resources office, as well as by staff reaching out to various Auxiliary Board members and Local Spiritual Assemblies across the country. Results were modest at best, attracting only seven volunteers for the full term (starting

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The three permanent Bahá'í schools, during a three-cycle period from winter 2019 through the beginning of summer 2019, accommodated nearly 4,400 total attendees in 85 programs.

at summer's-end 2018). Though most were able to thrive and foster lasting relationships, for some participants adjusting to full-time service and study in a remote location took its toll. Owing to the small number of volunteers, the OES moved them as one team from campus to campus.

Use of space

The snapshot of the use of space at the permanent schools provided in the table below indicates the breadth of organized programming the OES and other Bahá'í agencies have realized. The three permanent Bahá'í schools have, in the past, annually accommodated a total of some 4,100 individuals. The table reflects a three-cycle period from winter 2019 through the beginning of summer 2019, during which nearly 4,400 total attendees participated in 85 programs.

It's important to note that these statistics do not reflect the unique attendance of individuals at particular sessions or for particular programs; instead it is understood that individuals may have participated in more than one program through the period. Nor do the numbers extract those registered as facilitators and teachers. The OES is continuing to learn how to apply meaningful analysis to the numbers by measuring the attendance of a subset often referred to as "friends of the Faith" or the "community of interest." Further evidence of the impact of this subset on statistical analysis is detailed in each of the following reports from centers of learning or seasonal schools.

Program attendance, Winter & Spring 2019

Location	Total attendees	OES programs	Institutional programs	Rentals	Program totals	Estimated Friends of the Faith
Bosch	851	5	8	5	18	10%
Green Acre	1,197	14	14	1	29	15%
Louhelen	1,735	4	9	0	13	73%
Seasonal schools	171	2	0	0	2	10%
Hope & Family Weekends	325	4	0	0	4	85%
Totals	4,279	29	31	6	66	43%



Bosch Bahá'í School, Santa Cruz, California

Advancement in family programs

trengthening the capacities of families was one of the principal focuses of the work of Bosch Bahá'í School during 2019–20. To this end, Bosch collaborated with friends serving in the field to revise the "Hope and the Family" program, a series of weekend sessions meant to assist families in a neighborhood to see themselves as members of a collective entity—that is, as a nucleus of protagonists contributing to building an ever-advancing civilization.

facilitators helped these friends learn to turn to the Bahá'í Writings as an unassailable standard for guidance and a basis for advancing our collective understanding. Participants began to see the power of this habit and to realize that this is what the curriculum of the Ruhi Institute serves to do: to raise our capacity to turn to the Writings for the necessary guidance to transform our inner and outer lives.

Summer youth initiative

The Regional Bahá'í Council asked Bosch to host a five-week session for youth eager to develop their capacity through Bosch collaborated with friends serving in the field to revise the "Hope and the Family" program, a series of weekend sessions meant to assist families in a neighborhood to see themselves as members of a collective entity—that is, as a nucleus of protagonists contributing to building an ever-advancing civilization.



Family programming further evolved this year through the piloting of a first weekend installment of "Walking Together on a Path towards Race Amity and Oneness." This program made it possible for participants to look at the particular ways children's classes, junior youth groups, and other core activities address divisive racial attitudes and behavior.

The majority of families attending the Race Amity family session obviously came knowing racism exists. Program

study, practice, and outreach to communities in the vicinity of the school. Bosch staff had to consider how to balance this service with their workload, especially in terms of work hours and avoiding overtime, exhaustion, occasional illness, and causing the school to be short-staffed. In the end, they were able to assist the region to achieve its goal, with the youth coming to Bosch successfully completing the first five books in the sequence of courses. Participants returned to their home communities with greater conviction in their identity as descen-

Staff has the joy of participating in home visits, study circles, junior youth groups, and more in the nearby reservoir cluster of Santa Clara. Here, the school's friendships with families help to determine the design of upcoming programs.



dants of our spiritual ancestors and protagonists in the spiritual practices of the Five Year Plan.

Increased collaboration

Progress seen in the quality and success of Bosch programs is a direct result of the accompaniment the school has been receiving from the Continental Board of Counselors, the National Spiritual Assembly, and, ever increasingly, the friends joining Bosch in learning. Staff has the joy of participating in home visits, study circles, junior youth groups, and more in the nearby reservoir cluster of Santa Clara. Here, the school's friendships with families help to determine the design of upcoming programs. Through these efforts, families are inviting other families to join them in participating in Bosch programs and activities. Bosch is also learning how to address challenges and obstacles that have naturally arisen.

Each year, Bosch serves as the venue for a number of gatherings initiated by agencies concerned with furthering Bahá'í participation in public, scholarly, and professional discourse. During 2019–20, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP) conducted two seminars designed for undergraduate students at Bosch—the first in June, the second in December. The ISGP seminars explore the elements of a conceptual

framework for thought and action inspired by both science and religion.

The 'Irfán Colloquium, dedicated to study of the Bahá'í writings and their intersection with intellectual and religious trends, held one of its annual programs at Bosch in May, with offerings in both English and Persian. The Association for Bahá'í Studies-North America conducted discussions for working groups of professionals in two separate subject areas this year—one on Health and the other on Media and Society.

A call for volunteers

Participation in the youth volunteer program at the permanent Bahá'í schools has declined in recent years. Bosch piloted the "24" youth program inviting young people to devote a period of time to service at the schools while developing their capacity through activities in the neighborhoods surrounding them. While volunteers graduated from the program with a great deal of valuable experience, participation was not sufficient or sustainable. Bosch is beginning to reach out to Local Spiritual Assemblies to collaborate and ask if they could devote a week or two each year to service at the school, providing an opportunity for their community members to build camaraderie while serving as a team.

Green Acre Bahá'í School, Eliot, Maine

uring 2019–20, Green Acre
Bahá'í School operated four to seven days a week throughout the course of the year. School programs served more than 3,100 participants, with some 19 percent coming from the larger community.

On the local level, Green Acre continued to be active in the community-building work of the Five Year Plan through its support of the efforts of the Piscatagua cluster to advance to the next milestone on the continuum of growth. The school's contributions were made, in part, through aiding local community members and families to develop greater capacity for the spiritual education of children and for the hosting of devotional gatherings. Programs that help participants to learn how to use the arts as a catalyst for growth have also been a focus of the school's Planrelated efforts. The school expanded its collaboration with the Regional Training Institute in the hosting of neighborhood and regional camps throughout the year. In addition, the school continues to play a role as host for Regional Bahá'í Council meetings and regional institutional gatherings, as well for the regular undergraduate seminars conducted by the Institute for the Study of Global Prosperity (ISGP).

Changes in staffing and in orientation

Two key management positions have brought the efforts of new staff members to bear in the areas of operations and programming. Turnover and training are an integral part of capacity building in the life of every team and are among its greatest challenges. The Green Acre team's development of a collective sense of ownership of activities on campus has been most encouraging. Most members are actively engaged in the advancement of the surrounding cluster and are on teaching teams. The culture at Green Acre has evolved into one of mutual support and collaboration.

Advancement in family programs

Green Acre has continued to serve families both nationally and regionally through the various offerings of its summer and winter programs. One of the school's most determined efforts early in 2019–20 centered on local families and aiding each of them to see themselves as a team. The Green Acre team set a goal to hold weekly gatherings on the topic of spiritual parenting and to use social media as a means for attracting new participants to the weekly gatherings as well as to monthly gatherings of "Community in Unity" and the first weekend in the "Hope and the Family" series.

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The Green Acre team has experimented with creating occasions for discourse on social issues and has simultaneously been developing a series of art shows.

The process of weekly consultation, action, and reflection around a line of action has aided the team's development significantly and made it possible to carry out one daylong "Community in Unity" program as well as a weekend-long "Hope and the Family" session. In addition, ensuring that the team includes members of different departments as well as local community members has significantly enhanced the vision and the unity of the entire Green Acre staff. A key observation is that there is a sizable group of families who are already interacting with members of the team through children's classes, playgroups, school, and other local events through which friendships have been formed.

Combining the arts and discourse

During the past 10 cycles, the team has experimented with creating occasions for discourse on social issues and has simultaneously been developing a series of art shows. The team discovered the potential for combining the arts and discourse through a series called "Exploring Justice through Beauty," which combines dialogue, art shows, and performances as well as learning labs. The series included explorations of Afrofuturism and the theme of "Inherited Beauty," both of which allowed for a different kind of dialogue centered on concepts of race

and oneness of humanity in light of the Bahá'í writings. In addition, the team celebrated the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb with a show called "Dawn of the Light."

During the last cycle, the Green Acre team-inspired by a vision of how the arts could serve as a catalyst for the growth of the Faith-embarked on another series called "Pupil of the Eye." This series expands on the combining of discourse and artistic expression and includes live theater and outreach to local high schools and colleges. The unity of vision these efforts have built among team members has fostered learning from experience and increased capacity for growth. Green Acre is learning how the watchword "freedom from prejudice" can meaningfully contribute to social discourse in this region on the most vital and challenging issue of racial prejudice.

The Green Acre team is gaining capacity to significantly contribute to growth locally and continue collaboration with local and regional institutions while maintaining existing programs to serve the friends across the region. The coming year will build on these strengths and offer blended courses where college students can begin their studies in person at Green Acre and continue online.



Louhelen Bahá'í School, Davison, Michigan

ne year 2019-20 has been a period of significant growth and activity for Louhelen Bahá'í School. As the institution continues its efforts to position itself at the forefront of learning and field experience, staff members have developed their capacity to increase the number of friends serving Louhelen as volunteers and to systematically reach out to the larger community. Formerly seen, in part, as a conference and retreat center intended to serve Bahá'ís, Louhelen has redefined itself as a Bahá'í center of learning, offering programs and activities that embrace a diversity of individuals and families from the larger community, especially in one receptive neighborhood in nearby Flint, Michigan.

In striving to align itself with the goals and objectives of the Five Year Plan, Louhelen has undertaken an accelerated path of study, prayer, action, and reflection. This approach has led to the hosting, facilitating, and supporting of such programs as:

- Family sessions studying the power of race amity.
- Intensive regional youth and junior youth studies of courses from the Ruhi curriculum.
- A community-building and teaching conference for newly arrived African immigrants and their friends.
- Accompaniment seminars with Bahá'í institutions, neighborhood teaching teams, families, and individuals.

An expanding use of the campus

Louhelen had the honor of hosting the 2019 Office of Education and Schools Annual Administrative Conference. Meanwhile, the Midwestern region came together in October to pray, enjoy fellowship, and conduct an important component of the Bahá'í electoral

process during the national Unit Conventions. The distinguished 'Irfán Colloquium continues to hold its scholarly gatherings at Louhelen, and more than 50 friends from Michigan's MI-8 cluster celebrated the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb on campus. Thanks to Louhelen's convenient location and spiritual environment, Regional Bahá'í Council gatherings are also a regular occurrence at the school. Additional programs during 2019-20 included the Annual Seasonal Schools Seminar, and graduate seminars sponsored by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP).

Outward orientation and increasing use of the arts

An ever-expanding outward orientation has served as a springboard for a similar widening of Louhelen's program offerings. Louhelen's teaching efforts have fully embraced the arts as a steppingstone to increasing community receptivity to the Faith's universal principles. In March 2019, in collaboration with The Children's Theater Company of New York, Louhelen presented *Glimmerings* of Hope, an original musical based on one of the workbooks of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. Three key schools were invited to see the show, including The New Standard Academy in Flint.

Following the performance, Louhelen, The New Standard Academy, and The Children's Theater Company were able to establish a memorandum of understanding that allows a team from Louhelen to facilitate the study of *Glimmerings of Hope* during school hours. The same team works after school with families in the area in all four core activities with the full approval of the school administration, the community at large, the Louhelen administrator, and members of the Regional Bahá'í Council. This major advancement demonstrates

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how community partners can become protagonists in the work of rebuilding society.

One of the additional benefits that grew out of using the arts as a teaching tool was the opportunity to establish a local chapter of The Children's Theater Company in Flint, with The New Standard Academy serving as its artistic home.



Further contributions to building outreach and accompaniment in the larger community during previous cycles included community involvement at the Martin Luther King Jr. Park, in Flint's inner city. As part of Louhelen's outreach, staff members joined with

staff from The New Standard Academy, the Flint-Genesee County Library, and MLK Park neighborhood residents to celebrate the arts, engage children and youth, and create a safe space for elevated conversations.

Other achievements for the year

In addition to the successes highlighted above, Louhelen has also been improving the quality of the campus grounds. Capital funds aided in resurfacing various roads, and extensive remodeling of the historic Louhelen farmhouse was finished. Additional work updating campus facilities continues. Major remodeling work was performed on the lobby of the main building, providing guests visiting the campus with a more modern and spacious environment.

As the Bahá'í community moves toward conclusion of the Five Year Plan, Louhelen is happy to see its staff working to advance the MI-8 cluster toward the second milestone of growth. The school's staff members are also becoming more effective in the collection and utilization of statistics. Louhelen anticipates, in the coming years, seeing the cluster become one of the first in the region to achieve the third milestone of growth, where the friends will work with thousands from the neighborhoods Louhelen Bahá'í School is both accompanying and learning from.

Seasonal Bahá'í schools

n keeping with a mandate from the National Spiritual Assembly, the Office of Education and Schools (OES) prepared a special intensive program for the seasonal Bahá'í schools in 2019–20.

A special intensive program

The program, called "Walking Together on a Path towards Race Amity and Oneness," emphasizes the roles of families and groups of families in community building and the eradication of racial prejudice. It began operating with the support of a task force that represents a rich diversity of racial and ethnic heritages and benefits from close collaboration with the Continental Boards of Counselors.

Learning over the past year raised several questions related to the program's theme:

- Considered from the standpoint of race, how do families and groups of families advance their understanding of the Five Year Plan and participate in related activities in a neighborhood or cluster?
- What capacities of accompaniment will, if properly developed, enable participants attending seasonal schools to begin to see themselves as protagonists in their neighborhoods?
- Will these capacities enable participants to enter into elevated conversations with individuals and families who attended the bicentenary events?
- Can a handful of consecrated believers effectively accompany a group of families within a population?
- Can discourse on race serve as a portal for elevated conversations?

The overarching goal of these questions was and is the ultimate grounding of all discussions of awareness and tolerance among seasonal school participants in

relationships built upon genuine love and true friendship. The task force also created a series of questions designed to help small- and large-group facilitators, children's class teachers, and seasonal school committees to reflect on the capacities gained by those who attend the schools.

Another feature of the seasonal school program was a special race unity edition of *Brilliant Star* magazine, the May–June 2019 issue, created in consultation with OES and the *Brilliant Star* team. Guiding the consultation was the observation that aligning adult and youth material along similar themes of study nurtures family conversations about overcoming racial prejudice. The *Brilliant Star* team hosted several videoconferences with seasonal-school children's teachers in May concerned with effectively using and adapting the materials for their classrooms.

"Hope and the Family"

During 2019–20, OES developed a form of the "Hope and the Family" program suited for weekend camps for families whose children are taking part in Bahá'í children's classes or the junior youth spiritual empowerment program. The camps' collective aim is to help families see themselves as protagonists in their own spiritual and material well-being. As they return to their neighborhoods, they join others in studying *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* and, ideally, grow to recognize the power of prayer and the overall power of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.

Several lessons emerged from one weekend camp in the Creighton neighborhood in Phoenix, Arizona. After an initial gathering drew low attendance because of concerns about the location, eight families participated in a second weekend that attracted some 42 family members. An Auxiliary Board member who helped organize the weekend was particularly impressed by the ownership

he "Walking Together on a Path towards Race Amity and Oneness" program emphasizes the roles of families and groups of families in community building and the eradication of racial prejudice. It began operating with the support of a task force that represents a rich diversity of racial and ethnic heritages and benefits from close collaboration with the Continental Boards of Counselors.

In early gatherings,
Hispanic friends were
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when the camp experience
was shared with African
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excited about joining.



of the program mothers demonstrated in making sure that the husbands and all of their children, junior youth, and youth (including college students) would be involved and participating. Immediately following the camp, parents and youth from the neighborhood formed a committee and began planning the next gathering.

Two of the principal populations comprising the Creighton neighborhood are Hispanics and Africans. In early gatherings, Hispanic friends were the only participants. But when the camp experience was shared with African friends, they became excited about joining. Since the two populations speak different languages, the initial thinking was to hold two different camps. When the question whether to have one or two camps was presented to both groups, however, those participating expressed the desire to be together and took sufficient ownership of structuring the camp to ensure both groups were included in every activity. Incorporating culture and the arts was a key component of the weekend, with families bringing musical instruments and songs to share. The multigenerational aspect of the camp was also pleasing to see-in some groups, youths facilitated for their families.

Insights emerging from the weekend camps included the following:

- The creation of an environment in which populations resident in the neighborhood taught others was an important factor in the gatherings' success.
- The more parents participated, the more ownership they took and the more the conversation became theirs. Ensuring that families made decisions and took part on their own terms made a great difference in the quality of the gatherings.
- The gatherings helped parents to better understand the foundational role of the Bahá'í Faith in the activities in which their children and youth have been involved.
- The gatherings provide another means for populations to engage with the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, opening a way for them to ultimately become protagonists in the Faith's community-building work.

Wilmette Institute

he Wilmette Institute, a center of Bahá'í learning offering online study and dialogue on the history and teachings of the Faith, continued its mission in 2019–20 to help individuals and communities apply learning to the advancement of civilization.

Offering courses for credit

The year 2019–20 saw significant progress in the Wilmette Institute's ability to offer online courses for college credit:

- Two full-time staff members—a registrar and an associate director—joined the Institute's existing two-member part-time staff, greatly enhancing capacity.
- The Institute revised its strategic plan, purpose, and desired learning outcomes, strengthening their focus on capacities it aspires to assist learners to acquire—particularly as they relate to public discourse, social action, and social transformation.
- Staff began work with a marketing firm to revamp the Institute's look and voice, redesign its website, and develop ways to attract college students to Institute courses via social media.
- The three full-time staff members attended a three-day seminar sponsored by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) in October to determine whether the Institute can become accredited to offer courses for college credit.
- The Institute has begun working on the 100-page self-study that must be submitted to the DEAC. In the process, it has had to define many policies, upgrade the quality of its courses, and plan new faculty training.
- In December 2019, the Institute renewed its partnership agreement with the United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, so that Bahá'ís can

pursue a master of arts degree in religion or a master's in interfaith chaplaincy and take up to a quarter of their courses from the Wilmette Institute.

- In January 2020, the Institute was invited to affiliate with a major center for the study of religion in the United States that already includes as affiliates many of the world's major religions. Affiliation would put the Institute in a strong position to reach out to undergraduates and graduates across the country with its courses, to develop social transformation courses in an interfaith context, and to become strongly involved in public discourse.
- The Wilmette Institute is broadening its outreach to Bahá'ís with expertise in teaching college-level courses on social issues. It has also begun to compile a database of Bahá'í campus associations (clubs) and is writing to them regularly to encourage their activities.

Noncredit "Community Learning" courses

The Institute's noncredit course offerings also continue to develop. In 2019, the Institute offered 61 online courses and served 1,220 registrants. Twenty-eight percent (336) lived outside the United States; of these, 128 resided in Canada. The total number of countries where the Wilmette Institute has had learners now exceeds 126; last year alone, they came from 52 nations.

The Institute offered 12 new noncredit courses, including "365 Courses," which can be started at any time and finished at a registrant's own pace. The list below, a sampling of the courses, shows the wide range of interests they cover:

- "The Arts and Community Building"
- "Achieving Moral Excellence in Business"

Staff members attended a three-day seminar sponsored by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission in October to determine whether the Institute can become accredited to offer courses for college credit.

ver 80 Web talks are now available on the Institute's YouTube channel, six of which have been translated into Spanish. The channel now has over 3,135 subscribers (28 percent more than last year) and had 100,569 views in 2019 (a 14 percent increase over 2018).

- "Economic Justice in a World of Injustices"
- "The Seven Valleys and the Arts of Transformation"
- "Building Intercultural Understanding as a Couple"
- "Enhancing Love, Friendship, and Service in Your Marriage"
- "Nurturing Your Baby Spiritually during Pregnancy"

Celebrating the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

Last year the Institute conducted six special courses designed to contribute to our national community's celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb:

- "Discovering the Báb's Persian Bayán"
- "The Life of the Báb"
- "The Bábí Faith, 1844 to 1863: Rediscovering the Dawn-breakers"
- "The Báb's Qayyúmu'l-Asmá"
- "The Writings of the Báb"
- "Celebrating the Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb with Children"

Web video

The Wilmette Institute offered 19 free high-quality Web talks in 2019, which were subsequently posted to the Institute's <u>YouTube channel</u>. Over 80 Web talks are now available, six of which have been translated into Spanish. The channel now has over 3,135 subscribers (28 percent more than last year) and had 100,569 views in 2019 (a 14 percent increase over 2018).

Application of learning

Many Wilmette Institute students are using what they learn in their Institute courses in devotional gatherings, home visits, children's classes, presentations to junior youth and youth groups, deepenings, and Nineteen Day Feasts in their home communities, directly supporting a culture of learning. They are actively supporting interfaith gatherings, groups spreading awareness of climate change, and efforts to bring about sustainable agriculture and development. During 2019-20, the Institute published a poem and two PowerPoint presentations created by students. Publisher George Ronald also released two books by students who completed the Institute's course on "Writing Biographies and Histories."

In keeping with its mission, the Wilmette Institute will continue to explore ways to create a dynamic coherence of learning, teaching, social action, and dialogue about the Bahá'í revelation and pressing social problems to enhance the Faith's standing in the world.



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House of Worship Activities Office

The multipurpose Welcome Center

he Activities Office will soon complete its fifth year occupying the Bahá'í House of Worship's architecturally striking Welcome Center, which continues to draw large numbers of people inspired by their visits to the Temple to learn more about the Faith. Whenever possible, these inquirers are put in touch with Bahá'ís in their home communities through the national Seeker Response System. The iPad kiosks installed on both the upper level of the building and in the bookstore enable visitors to request further information or to be connected with Bahá'ís in their home communities.

The attractiveness and effectiveness of the building's displays continue to be carefully studied. At this writing, there are displays in place focusing on the lives of the Faith's Central Figures, on elements of Bahá'í community life, and on the efforts of Bahá'ís to build communities anew.

Bicentenary activities

The majestic Mother Temple of the West—the great "Silent Teacher" of the Faith—played an appropriately significant role in the celebrations of the historic bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. Highlights included the:

- Commemorations of the Twin Holy Birthdays organized by several different local Bahá'í communities.
- Rare display of the portrait of the Báb permanently residing in our National Bahá'í Archives to participants in dawn prayers held on Tuesday, October 29.
- Exhibit of some precious relics associated with the life of the Báb, open to the public in the Presentation Room of the Welcome Center.
- Holding of a special concert in Foundation Hall featuring a collaborative performance by the Lincolnwood Symphony Orchestra and the Bahá'í House of Worship Choir.

- Multiple showings of the film Dawn of the Light.
- Display at the Welcome Center of an artistic tribute to the Báb. Titled "750" in remembrance of the Báb's execution by 750 rifles, the piece is composed of 750 photographs of hands holding a lighted candle. The pictures were contributed by 18 photographers from five countries.

Working with neighborhood populations

The Activities Office has been seeking ways to foster in nearby communities a sense of ownership of the Temple and to better understand how a House of Worship can gradually become the spiritual center of a community.

One example is in the Office's relationship with believers in the neighboring community of Evanston, where, bolstered by the support of the Local Spiritual Assembly, multiple groups of the friends have increased their use of the Temple by regularly organizing devotionals and serving together as guides. One group has dedicated itself to hosting a series of film showings in the Welcome Center on the theme of social justice. Participants begin by praying together in the Temple; meaningful conversations follow their viewing of the films. Participants often join community-building activities back in their neighborhoods.

The aim of this effort and others is to increase connections between the House of Worship and the larger community through friendships and continuing collaborations.

Outreach to the community

During 2019–20, the Office furthered its efforts to build relationships with local interfaith groups and other like-minded organizations. Indicative of this strengthened outward-looking orientation were the following events:

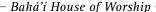
Spiritual music of the African-American experience. This program, coinciding

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The majestic Mother Temple of the West played an appropriately significant role in the celebrations of the historic bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb.



In response to the publication of John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie: A Man, a Trumpet, and a Journey to Bebop, a new biography for young people about this renowned jazz musician, a special well-attended celebration of his life and legacy—sponsored in conjunction with the Jazz Institute of Chicago—was held in Foundation Hall during Black History Month.

Bahá'í House of Worship statistics • March 2019 - February 2020

Category	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Devotions in Auditorium	417	776	753	761	762	753	759
Total attendance at devotions	12,016	12,720	14,028	N/A	15,105	16,336	18,297
Volunteer hours (guiding and choir)	8,045	8,561	9,003	7,342	9,186	7,484	6,514
Tours	123	128	146	145	152	136	160
Visitors to the Auditorium	340,131	253,382	N/A	N/A	481,999*	306,328*	431,082*
Vistors to the Welcome Center	206,032	190,535	N/A	N/A	152,808*	161,682*	171,964*
Weddings	27	23	24	21	28	21	25
Student interviews	88	105	54	N/A	62	77	158**
Interest Requests (via kiosks and cards)	92	92	72	178	125	266	274
Declarations	7	8	17	28	24	4	11
Memorials	N/A	3	3	N/A	6	4	7

^{*}Raw figures from the automatic counter, which are very unreliable due to counting the same people going in and out, people going in and out of different doors, battery failure, etc. It is likely the previous figures calculated using a formula are also unreliable.

^{**} Student interviews increased in 2019/20 because of visits by about 70 students from Loyola University's Introductory Theology class, coming in small groups over the course of October.



with the start of Black History Month in February, teamed the Bahá'í House of Worship Choir with the Lincolnwood Symphony Orchestra and featured a rich sampling of Negro spirituals sung by an expanded choir, and a selection of orchestral music both composed and inspired by African Americans.

Dizzy Gillespie book launch. In response to the publication of John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie: A Man, a Trumpet, and a Journey to Bebop, a new biography for young people about this renowned jazz musician, a special well-attended celebration of his life and legacy—sponsored in conjunction with the Jazz Institute of Chicago—was held in Foundation Hall during Black History Month.

North Shore Interfaith Leaders Award.

A ceremony in May was the 10th occasion that this award—given to young people for outstanding service to the

community inspired by their commitment to living out their respective faiths—was held in Foundation Hall.

Conversations on the Bahá'í Faith with Rainn Wilson. During the summer of 2019, the well-known actor Rainn Wilson offered three public presentations on the Faith in Foundation Hall, all of them well attended. One of these, titled "Physics and Mysticism," featured physicist Steven Phelps. A video recording of the event was posted on YouTube; at this writing, it has been viewed more than 8,400 times.

Special appearance by singer-songwriter Luke Slott. In September, as a contribution to the then-upcoming celebrations of the bicentenary of His Birth, a musical tribute to the Báb was offered in Foundation Hall by Irish singer-songwriter Luke Slott.



Special outreach to the Spanish-speaking community

The Office is continuing efforts to expand the number of programs at the Temple for the Spanish-speaking population, with weekly and monthly devotional programs, firesides, and introductory talks offered in Spanish.

Recruitment and training of guides

The Office has been learning how to more effectively mobilize a sufficient number of guides to serve at the House of Worship on a given day. Strategies include:

- Arranging meetings with nearby Local Assemblies and cluster agencies.
 Through one meeting, the idea of a "Temple Day" was instituted by a community. Tens of members now serve at the Temple on the same day.
- Stimulating multiple groups of friends engaged in core activities to come together to regularly serve at the Temple.
- Creating a call list for volunteers willing to be "on call" to serve as guides when needed.

Friends volunteering are trained, then accompanied until they feel comfortable

to guide on their own. Guides are encouraged to warmly welcome visitors to the Welcome Center, greeting them in a friendly but nonintrusive manner. If an opportunity to teach the Faith presents itself, it is approached in the form of meaningful conversation, addressing visitors' questions enthusiastically, but with succinctness and tact.

Volunteers

Bahá'ís from across the country and from abroad augment local volunteers in guiding and in serving in other roles at the Temple. Requests from the larger community to volunteer are also regularly received and are warmly welcomed.

Youth programs

The Activities Office continues to provide programs for youth in the summer months. The well-known "Spirit of the Cornerstone" program has taken several different forms in recent years. During the summer of 2019, nine young people, ages 18 to 30, took part in a six-week program that provided them with lodging in airBnB homes. In the future, the Regional Bahá'í Council may become more involved with summer programs at the Temple.

Strategies for more effectively mobilizing a sufficient number of guides to serve at the House of Worship include meeting with nearby Local Assemblies and cluster agencies, stimulating regular service by groups of friends engaged in core activities, and creating a call list for volunteers.



House of Worship Music Department

urrently, the choir includes singers from Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faith communities, while the balance of members are Bahá'ís. The choir also presents a diverse representation of the human family in the racial and ethnic origins of its members, who are variously African American, Asian, and white.

n the first three successive Sundays each month, the Bahá'í House of Worship Choir provides a selection of a cappella music based on the sacred scriptures of the world's major religions for the Temple's regularly scheduled 12:30 p.m. devotionals. In addition, the choir provides music for Bahá'í Holy Day observances and for the varied special programs held at the House of Worship in the course of a year.

During 2019–20, membership of the choir achieved a strength of 25 singers, as despite the sudden loss of one member, new singers were gained. The choir's goal has for some time been to achieve a committed group of 40 singers; at present, the average number of singers participating in the choir's activities both at the Temple and in the larger community is approximately 17.

The choir's increasing number of engagements in the larger community testifies to the friendly and collegial relationship the House of Worship music director continues to enjoy with church choir directors and cantors along Chicago's North Shore.

The choir continues to rehearse regularly at the home of the music director, which enhances the community-building character of this volunteer enterprise. Currently, the choir includes singers from Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faith communities, while the balance of members are Bahá'ís. The choir also presents a diverse representation of the human family in the racial and ethnic origins of its members, who are variously African American, Asian, and white.



Successful Black History Month concert

For a second year, a musical program was presented at the House of Worship to open the celebration of Black History Month on the North Shore. Titled "And Still We Rise: Music from the African-American Experience," the program once again teamed the House of Worship Choir with the Lincolnwood Symphony Orchestra. The program featured a rich sampling of Negro spirituals, Gospel music, and orchestral music both composed and inspired by African Americans. The event attracted a capacity audience to Foundation Hall, including a wide diversity of guests from neighboring communities.

Annual Bahá'í Choral Music Festival

A highlight of the year 2019–20 was the Thirteenth Annual Bahá'í Choral Music Festival, which brought a total of some

1,500 friends and neighbors from the communities surrounding the Temple to two separate devotional concerts at different hours. Choir participants came from most states and from several countries and included a larger number of young people than in previous years.

The Choral Festival has without question become the most popular event on the Temple's calendar every year, consistently attracting a larger attendance by individuals who are not Bahá'ís than any other. Its success has led other Bahá'í Houses of Worship across the world to follow suit, and similar choral festivals are being held at the Temples in Australia and Germany.

Participation in bicentenary events

In addition to its participation in devotional programs held in connection with the Twin Holy Birthdays, the choir was featured in special programs held at the House of Worship and elsewhere to celebrate the bicentenary of the Báb's Birth. Among them were:

- A well-attended concert in Foundation Hall featuring a collaborative performance with the Lincolnwood Symphony Orchestra.
- A concert in Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, the "central and dominant feature" of the campus of the University of Chicago. This represented the first time Chicago Bahá'ís succeeded in sponsoring a program in this historic venue.

Outreach performances

For some years now, the choir has been happily responding to invitations to participate in events in the larger community, the majority of which are sponsored by interfaith organizations and local churches. During 2019–20, the choir performed at the following local event:

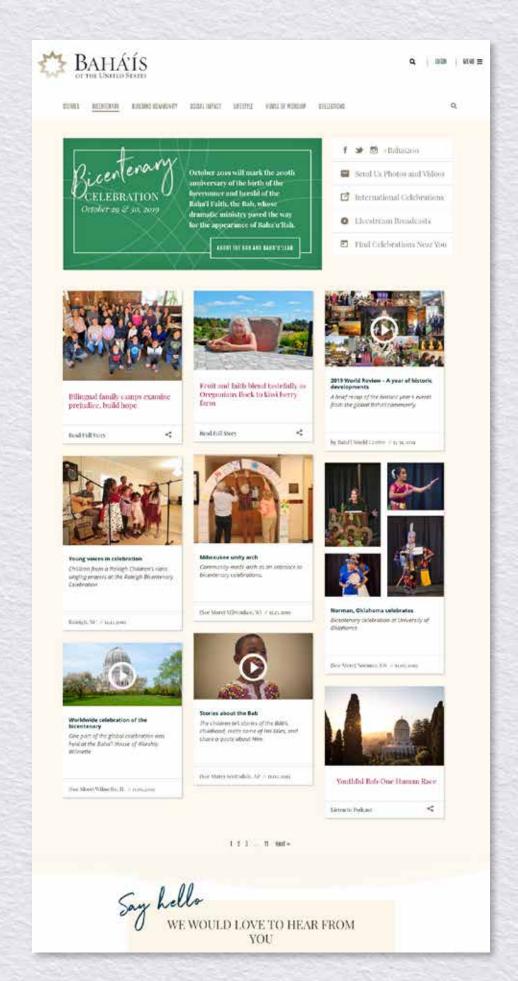
DuPage Interfaith Resource Network Thanksgiving Service, St. Procopius Abbey, Benedictine University, Lisle, Illinois. Recognized as one of the event's prime participants, the choir joined in this event—well attended by people from the local community—for a ninth year.

Activities of the music director

During 2019–20, the music director was again widely involved in local and national programs either as a performer, as a workshop facilitator, or as an invited participant. These events, which focused on music or on eradicating racism, were sponsored by both Bahá'í communities and outside organizations.

- Participant, with several choir members, in a Gospel workshop held at a church in Ferguson, Missouri, the community in which Michael Brown, an African American high school student, was killed in a controversial incident involving law enforcement. A member of the Brown family was present at the event.
- Participant, with three choir members and 28 other North Shore residents, in a pilgrimage to Montgomery, Alabama, to visit the Legacy Museum, Rosa Parks Museum, and Memorial for Social Justice. In part, the trip solidified friendships with many Wilmette residents and residents from other North Shore communities who had never before visited the House of Worship or participated in Bahá'í-sponsored activities.
- Conductor (for a ninth time), Gospel Music Workshop, Chautauqua Institution, New York.
- Singer at event sponsored by the Parliament of the World's Religions.
- Active member of Race Awareness on the North Shore (RAIN) and Healing Everyday Racism in our Schools (HEROS), participant in focus group on race for BahaiTeachings.org, and Board member of Together is Better (TiB).

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Office of Communications

uring 2019–20, learning in the Office of Communications was focused on how its communications can be better made to support and further the process of growth being advanced across the American Bahá'í community. The team also took a fresh look at creating and delivering content that sparks interest and helps to advance inquirers along a path of engagement with the Faith. Approaches already explored include:

- Focusing on the experiences of friends and inquirers as they move along a continuum of engagement toward full participation in the life of the community.
- Moving toward a digital-first publication model, with a corresponding shift in the role of print publications.
- Focusing on cluster-level and teaching-team-level needs, being continually mindful of the question "How does this [product, initiative, service] advance or support the process of growth?"

Content for the national website

The launch of the redesigned national website (at www.bahai.us) in May 2018 has provided a powerful and flexible digital publication platform, and the Office has continued to publish on it rich collections of text, photography, video, and audio stories on the Bahá'í House of Worship and in the general categories of building community, social impact, and lifestyle. An editorial team meets twice weekly to review articles, photos, videos, podcasts, and other digital content, ensuring that it avoids jargon and is accessible to all audiences.

Stories are published on a weekly basis digitally, followed by further editing for the print medium. More than 22,000 users also receive content via a monthly e-newsletter, which is accessible in tone and engaging to everyone regardless of their level of involvement with the Faith. Meanwhile, the video storytelling project themed *A Rich Tapestry*, which involves

a team of collaborators, continues to identify, capture, and produce video stories that illustrate how the community-building efforts of Bahá'ís address issues of race and culture.

The Office continues to expand a network of digital content and storytelling collaborators. With assistance from the Bahá'í World Center's Office of Public Discourse, it identified and nurtured several dozen photographers to capture preparations for and commemorations of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb around the country. A call for submissions was later opened to the whole community, and, in the weeks leading up to the bicentenary and during the commemorations, the friends submitted more than 5,000 images and videos. The Office dedicated a page on bahai.us to this rich collection, and shared contributions with the Bahá'í World Center's online bicentenary presentation. It also provided a live webcast of bicentenary commemorations at the House of Worship.

Digital outreach tools

The Office has growing experience with iOS and Android apps. The digital e-zine edition of *The American Bahá'í* is now published simultaneously with the print edition, and two years of back issues are available through the e-zine app. The Office is collaborating with the Bahá'í National Center's Information Technology department on the design and content process for the newly released bahai.us app, which will initially focus on content and services for registered Bahá'ís.

The Internet project team in New York is gaining capacity to accompany large numbers of teaching teams in the use of digital outreach tools to attract steady flows of new participants into Bahá'í activities. These efforts are expanding to new areas, and the friends involved are gaining valuable experience in the effective use of digital outreach to complement cluster-level processes of growth.

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At the request of the National Spiritual Assembly's Secretary, the Office of Communictions is producing a new publication—intended for a general audience and modeled on *The Bahá'ís* magazine—that focuses on community-building efforts of Bahá'ís across the United States and their impact on issues of race, diversity, and social justice.

To complement the effort in New York, a strategic promotion team has been established in Wilmette to focus on two learning goals: how to use digital outreach tools to refine content and messaging, and how to use these tools to engage new audiences. The team is in the process of designing digital outreach efforts to increase the volume of seekers entering the national seeker response system.

Inquiry Services

The Inquiry Services team has developed systems to quickly triage and respond appropriately to the wide range of Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í inquiries coming through online contact forms, live chat, bahaite-achings.org, the 800-22-UNITE toll-free number, the visitor kiosks at the House of Worship, and other channels. The team also acted to strengthen the role of Local Spiritual Assemblies in welcoming new believers who initiate enrollment online.

The Office has made significant progress toward the creation of a robust new inquiry management system to replace the outdated Seeker Response System. Its development has involved collaboration between several National Center offices.

Special publications

The Office is refining its capacity to produce special publications and exhibits, including a bicentenary tri-fold brochure, which sold some 25,000 copies in the months leading up to the anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, and several new and updated displays for the House of Worship Welcome Center. In addition, at the request of the National Spiritual Assembly's Secretary, it is producing a new publication-intended for a general audience and modeled on The Bahá'ís magazine—that focuses on community-building efforts of Bahá'ís across the United States and their impact on issues of race, diversity, and social justice.

THE AMERICAN BAHÁ'Í

The American Bahá'í during 2019–20 intensified its planning for a continuing series of evolutionary changes in how it reports and shares our national Bahá'í community's stories. Among the factors precipitating this evolution are:

- The general intention of the Bahá'í National Organization to incorporate collaboration, reflection, and accompaniment into routine operations.
- A media landscape dominated more and more by electronic devices.
- The continuing integration of various bureaus of the Office of Communications (OOC).

Writing and editing

To produce content for the "Stories" section of the bahai.us website that supports and reflects the movement of populations toward the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, staff of *The American Bahá'i* continued to take part in the Web editorial team alongside its OOC and Media Services colleagues. This has strengthened capacity to create articles on Five Year Plan activity that are both understandable and informative for a public audience, while also being useful and illuminating for deepened Bahá'ís and their partners in the Plan.

Collaboration within the OOC and with article contributors is also enriching staff's awareness of the race and class implications of what it edits and publishes, in the continued effort to present authentic and helpful stories.

Acquiring content

The American Bahá'í participated in the OOC's project to gather pictures, videos, and stories of local bicentenary activities in fall 2019, both for Web posting and for the magazine. Great advances in gathering large numbers of photos and in securing perpetual permission for their use by the National Assembly came mainly from two newly adopted methods: creation of a Web form for any individual or community to submit photos, descriptions, and narratives; and utilization of the WhatsApp phone communication app, with the coordination of contacts in each region. These developments hold great promise for continued efforts to gather content.

Digital delivery

To complement the articles available to the public on bahai.us, the member services website (bahai.us/community/)













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After several years' development, The American Bahá'í has gained the resources and experience necessary to regularly and reliably publish a mobile e-zine edition of the magazine for the iPad. The capability of publishing the e-zine for Android tablets is next on the horizon.

is under revision, in parallel with the development of a mobile app. These vehicles are intended to make it more convenient for enrolled Bahá'is to access messages, alerts, and other articles that should be distributed only to enrolled Bahá'is who can log in. Staff of *The American Bahá'i* and the OOC have joined the Information Technology office in consultation on structuring those vehicles; the consultation also involves the Office of the Secretary.

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Structure of the office

To further integrate story gathering and creation for a wide spectrum of audiences, the OOC and *The American Bahá'í* have taken steps to form a unified story team that will generate stories for many digital and printed media and for the full spectrum of audiences, rather than having separate writing, photography, and media staffs for public and Bahá'í audiences.

Topics of content

The printed edition of *The American Bahá'i* continues to be a news mainstay and a reinforcer of Bahá'i identity for tens of thousands of Bahá'i households from coast to coast. It serves to disseminate guidance from the Faith's senior institutions, providing focus and direction for Bahá'i activities; to inspire and encourage the national community to carry forward the Divine Plan; and to share news of how Bahá'ís are acting on the national, regional, and local levels to build community, to further the Cause, and to benefit humanity.

In addition to reporting on the Bahá'í National Convention and other major gatherings, the magazine presented packages of stories examining themes such as the:

 Vibrancy of community life in clusters at the forefront of learning and at other stages of development.

- Local activity that centered on the 200th anniversary of the Birth of the Báb, including preparations, celebrations, and follow-up.
- Surge of summer activity in every region, especially as carried out by youth.
- Value of interfaith engagement and discourse.
- Efforts, such as the "Pupil of the Eye" conference, to galvanize teaching of the Faith and Bahá'í identity among populations of particular significance.
- Growing learning about inviting more people onto paths of service while offering more opportunities for people to carry that service out.

Other vital collaborations

Regular study and consultation with the Learning Desk continues to inform staff's understanding of the Plan's priorities, and influences ideas and choices in content creation for The American Bahá'í. The publication benefits from collaborations with the Board of Trustees of Hugúgu'lláh; the Regional Bahá'í Councils; and the offices of the Bahá'í Distribution Service, Assembly Development, Brilliant Star, Community Administration, Fund Development, Human Resources, Inquiry Services, and Persian Public Information. Staff members also work closely with the Office of the Secretary to help produce the National Assembly's Ridván Annual Report.

US BAHÁ'Í MEDIA SERVICES

A Rich Tapestry

The centerpiece of Media Services' efforts this year continued to be the series of short video stories on the theme A Rich Tapestry, informally known as the Tapestry project. Inspired by the National Spiritual Assembly's seminal letter of February 25, 2017, and its subsequent major letters to the US Bahá'í community, the series expresses and illustrates how Bahá'ís are working to translate love into action to address questions of race and culture in the United States. The project's core consultative and planning team includes outside media professionals as well as Media Services and Office of Communications staff members.



Stories produced for the Web (and posted at www.bahai.us/collection/a-rich-tapestry/) during 2019–20 included:

- "Each One Reach One," about young adults' activity serving children in Houston.
- "Learning Friendships—Learning English," featuring a small group meeting regularly in Chicago.
- "Prayerful Voices for Change," on a group of women sharing prayer and mutual support in San Diego.
- "Finding Purpose and a Path of Service," about a young woman's journey through several localities.

Videos in production in March will tell stories of converging cultures in Phoenix and of building community on the Navajo Nation.

Tapestry Summit. In November, the planning team hosted an all-day Tapestry Summit aimed at deepening collective understanding of the project's objectives and challenges. Participants included the National Spiritual Assembly Secretary, some Office of Communications staff, media professionals who have worked with the project, and others from across the country active in learning about race and culture in the Bahá'í community.

Audience feedback. Responses to the Tapestry videos, often from people involved in the training and community-building processes, has been overwhelmingly

positive. One attendee at a North American inter-institutional gathering offered the following comments:

These videos are so accessible. I showed the one about the two mothers to my neighbor, and she immediately said, "I want to do that! What do I need to do?" So I told her we would do Book 1, and now she's a children's class teacher. ... It's neat how the stories are all told from the perspective of the protagonists. This made us see that we weren't doing that on our narratives. We were telling the story from our perspective and now we've made a shift.

Translations. Learning continues on how to present these stories in a variety of languages. One multi-language story to be posted online soon will have subtitles in English, Spanish, and Kinyarwanda, a language spoken by many Congolese refugees. Existing videos will be re-posted with Spanish subtitles.

Promotional strategy development

Media Services is participating in the planning for a strategic campaign that will address two consistent challenges affecting the national website (www.bahai.us): little to no promotion of the site and its rich content, and a resulting lack of data about audiences, audience reach, and use of the content.

This campaign is being designed to align with three stages of a user's journey in

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the use of the site and its contents namely: awareness, consideration, and decision. Analysis of these phases will help improve the creation and placement of video and other content, and the tracking of how people engage with and use these features.

Collaboration with other national agencies

Annual Choral Music Festival. Media Services is working with Bahá'í House of Worship Music Department staff to edit video from past Choral Festivals to be posted in higher resolution. Though at first technically challenging, this effort has provided valuable learning about how to produce Festival videos with improved quality and efficiency.

Young people's videos. Media Services has begun to accompany *Brilliant Star* magazine's staff in creating videos to reach an audience of children and junior youth.

Navajo translation of video. With coordination by Native American Bahá'í Institute (NABI) staff, Media Services facilitated a Navajo-language translation of *Dawn of the Light*, a video produced by the Bahá'í World Center for the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. A DVD of the finished video, created in collaboration with the Bahá'í Publishing Trust, was distributed through NABI and has been well received in the community.

Bicentenary events. Media Services organized an internet video live stream of the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Birth of the Báb at the Bahá'í House of Worship. It also videotaped and assembled content for related videos that were produced for and posted on the Bahá'í World Center's bicentenary website.

Digital asset management

Media Services continues to work with the Information Technology and National Archives offices to research means of securely backing up existing digital video files, digitizing the aging tape archives, and keeping all these files organized and accessible.

BRILLIANT STAR

Brilliant Star continues to help advance the Five Year Plan through its twofold mission. First, the magazine spiritually empowers children and junior youth, supporting their moral and intellectual development. Second, it offers valuable resources to assist parents and teachers in education and community building. With content that addresses timely issues, Brilliant Star is a welcome tool for sharing the Bahá'í Faith and participating in public discourse.

Bahá'í children receive gift subscriptions from the National Spiritual Assembly, for which they frequently express gratitude:

"It makes me feel positive and loved. Knowing that the National Spiritual Assembly loves all the children and takes the time to make the magazine and send it to us as a gift."

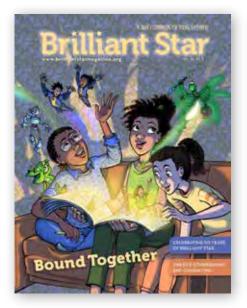
-Bayan B., age 10

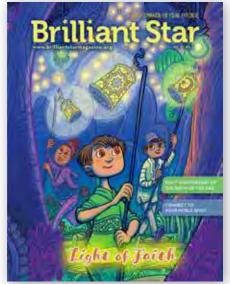
"I get really excited when it comes in the mail. I'm glad there is a *Brilliant Star* magazine because I'm really the only Bahá'í my age in my community and sometimes it is hard expressing that."

-Aava D., age 10

Single complimentary magazine subscriptions are also available to children's class teachers, junior youth group animators, and schoolteachers and counselors in the United States. Currently, 82 such teachers reach 1,285 young people.

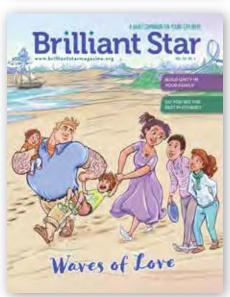
Brilliant Star received top honors from the Religion Communicators Council in 2019, including a DeRose-Hinkhouse Best of Class Award for its website, Brilliant Star Online. While team members have previously earned six such awards for the magazine itself, this was the first for the website. The magazine also received Awards of Excellence for its 2018 series of issues and the "Wonders of Creativity" cover art. It earned an APEX Award for Publication Excellence, honoring the website for the third consecutive year.











Four issues of Brilliant Star were produced during 2019-20: "Spirit of Community" (Vol. 50 No. 2), "Light of Faith" (Vol. 50 No. 3), "Waves of Love" (Vol. 50 No. 4), and "Bound Together" (Vol. 50 No. 5). "Spirit of Community," which focused on race unity, was developed to support teachers at US Bahá'í seasonal schools and in children's classes everywhere. Team members created elaborate "Inspiration and Resource Guides," offering a wide range of related activities and suggestions for adapting the content for various age groups. They also held video meetings to facilitate idea sharing and lesson planning with teachers.

Teachers from around the world were enthusiastic:

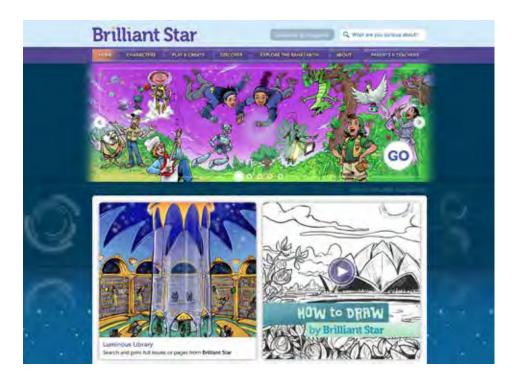
"Brilliant Star is a tremendous help! From the stories to the activities, I have been able to use the magazine [with children] from ages 3–12. It is such a valuable resource, and beautifully done."

-Jennifer H.

"Brilliant Star is such a wonderful way to educate our next generation. I feel every child that becomes registered as a Bahá'í should receive the Brilliant Star free until they age out to a youth."

-Douglas J.

nilliant Star team members attended the annual meeting for Bahá'í seasonal schools hosted by the National Assembly's Office of Education and Schools, where strategies were shared for integrating the magazine's content into schools, communitybuilding activities, and intergenerational spaces. The magazine's upcoming race unity issue (Vol. 50 No. 6) will be recommended to seasonal schools in 2020 to complement their race unity curriculum.



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Dr. Stephen Scotti, a NASA Distinguished Research Associate, continues to volunteer as *Brilliant Star*'s STEM Education Advisor. He writes and offers commentary on STEM-related content, answers children's questions, and connects the team with other STEM contributors. For the website, he interviewed astronaut Peggy Whitson, the American record holder for longest time in space (665 days) and the first female commander of the International Space Station.

Brilliant Star Online is vital for building and maintaining relationships with a global community of young people, parents, and teachers who increasingly use mobile devices. The "Luminous Library," the site's robust searchable and printable PDF database of magazine issues,

is a growing resource. Users can search, browse, or download individual activities or over 40 full issues. One teacher noted:

"I always [check] your website [to see] if you have materials, pages, stories, music or [suggestions for] arts and crafts activities available on the topic I am teaching. I love your materials."

–Bita A.

Team members continued to produce "Brilliant Star's Treasure Box" for The American Bahá'í, supporting core activities. The team strives to engage its audience through social media with regular, timely posts, and to work with award-winning scientists for the "We Are One" and "Space Ace" features.

With delivery of the magazine temporarily backlogged, team members are working to implement strategies to resume a timelier schedule. To strengthen team communication and unity, members hold regular video conferences to supplement as-needed daily discussions.

The *Brilliant Star* team is profoundly grateful for the opportunity to help "cultivate environments in which children can be raised untainted by any form of racial, national, or religious prejudice."

Bahá'í Publishing Trust and Distribution Service



he year 2019–20 was both busy and productive for the Bahá'í Publishing Trust. The 2019 spring/summer publishing season saw the release of several titles that aimed to edify and inspire the Bahá'í community in its efforts to fulfill the goals and objectives of the Universal House of Justice's current Five Year Plan.

Encouraging and supporting nationwide celebrations of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb was foremost in the Publishing Trust's aspirations. In addition to a dedicated gift set-designed to introduce the Báb to friends, local community leaders, and public libraries-the Trust's contributions included the following:

• Immortal Youth: A Tribute to the Life and Station of the Báb, a new

title published in the summer and launched at the annual Association for Bahá'í Studies-North America (ABS) Conference.

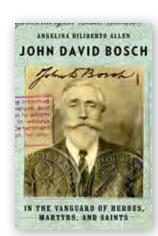
- A hardcover edition of Selections from the Writings of the Báb.
- A special bicentennial audio edition of Stories from the Dawn-Breakers, recorded on CD and featuring the voice of the Hand of the Cause of God William Sears.
- Distribution of the film Dawn of the Light, commissioned by the Universal House of Justice.
- Distribution of *The Báb*, a 20-page booklet created by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada.

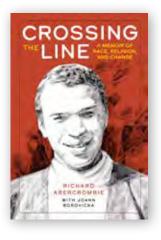
Two additional titles were published in time for the 2019 ABS conference: Dimensions of Bahá'í Law by Roshan Danesh, and John David Bosch: In the Vanguard of Heroes, Martyrs, and

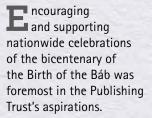
saw the release of *Crossing the Line*: A Memoir of Race, Religion, and Change by Richard Abercrombie with JoAnn Borovicka, and I Love My Name, a children's book by Linda Ahdieh Grant about the life of Táhirih.

Saints by Angelina Diliberto Allen. The fall publishing season, meanwhile,









new title in the recently launched Change Maker series—John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie: A Man, a Trumpet, and a Journey to Bebop—written by Susan Engle and illustrated by Luthando Mazibuko, was launched in partnership with the Jazz Institute of Chicago during Black History Month at the Bahá'í House of Worship.

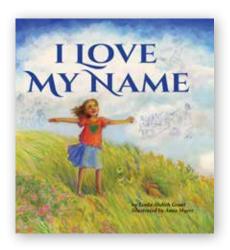
The Publishing Trust has also prepared several new titles for release in early 2020. These include:

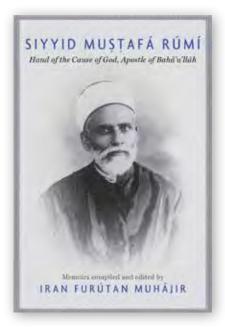
- Siyyid Muṣṭafá Rúmí: Hand of the Cause of God, Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh, memoirs compiled by Iran Furútan Muhájir.
- A new title in the recently launched Change Maker series—John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie: A Man, a Trumpet, and a Journey to Bebop written by Susan Engle, illustrated by Luthando Mazibuko, and launched in partnership with the Jazz Institute of Chicago during Black History Month at the Bahá'í House of Worship.
- Three new board books for young readers in the Tender Years series— This Fresh Plant, Like Unto a Pearl, and With Loving Kindness—all illustrated by Elaheh Mottahedeh Bos.

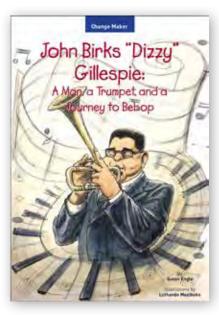
Also set for release in 2020 is a third new series, titled Pause & Reflect. The series is planned for the recently acquired One Voice Press imprint and will aim to serve a general audience interested in meditation and mindful living. The first title will be Pause & Reflect: Meditations for Creativity; a second manuscript, Pause & Reflect: Meditations for Young Families, is currently under development.

Another of the year's projects resulted from consultation with the Learning Desk concerning the needs of the Bahá'í community at the grassroots level. The group determined that there was a need for inexpensive booklets containing Bahá'í prayers and sacred texts in certain African languages prominent among refugee populations. The Publishing Trust worked with the Learning Desk to identify specific needs and acquire needed materials, leading to the publication in late summer of four titles—The Hidden Words and a praver book in Swahili, and The Hidden Words and a prayer book in Kinyarwanda.

In an effort to provide accompaniment for authors who aspire to write for the Faith, the Publishing Trust organized two author events: one at Green Acre Bahá'í School, and a second at Bosch Bahá'í









School. For the Bosch event, several authors were invited for a weekend writers' workshop titled "Conversations of the Heart" and offered in collaboration with the Office of Education and Schools. Both events were well received by participants and authors alike.

In addition to its participation in the annual conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies in Ottawa, Canada—where three new titles were launched—the Publishing Trust participated in the annual conference of the Association of the Friends of Persian Culture, held over Labor Day weekend in Schaumburg, Illinois.

During 2019–20, the Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS) continued to add titles from third-party vendors, bringing the total number of products distributed via <u>BahaiBookstore.com</u> to more than a

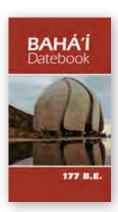


thousand. Some 80 percent of orders made through Bahaibookstore.com are shipped the same day, and almost all orders are shipped within 24 hours. During the year, BDS processed more than 8,500 orders. A free shipping promotion focused on reaching those who might want to give gifts for Ayyám-i-Há was a great success.

The Publishing Trust continues to offer a large number of sacred and authoritative texts in free digital text and audio formats. More than 12,000 free e-books were downloaded by visitors from approximately 170 countries in 2019. Free e-book downloads are now available in 11 languages in addition to English: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Persian, Polish, Spanish, Swahili, and Kinyarwanda. Additional languages will be added in the future.

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National Bahá'í Archives

he National Bahá'í Archives has the responsibility for acquiring, preserving, and providing access to materials documenting the history and activities of the National Spiritual Assembly and the United States Bahá'í community, in accord with Shoghi Effendi's guidance that:

The importance of the institution of Bahá'í Archives is not due only to the many teaching facilities it procures, but is essentially to be found in the vast amount of historical data and information it offers both to the present-day administrators of the Cause, and to the Bahá'í historians of the future.

The most cherished possessions of the Archives are the collections of original Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and letters from Shoghi Effendi that it preserves and protects. It also serves as a repository for the permanent records of the National Spiritual Assembly, the Bahá'í National Organization (BNO), and the Regional Bahá'í Councils. It assists Local Spiritual Assemblies and other Bahá'í organizations to manage their records, supporting the development of administrative systems.

In addition to receiving institutional records no longer current, the Archives welcomes donations of the personal papers of Bahá'ís, as well as materials documenting all segments of our diverse and ever-changing community. During 2019-20, the Archives received 149 accessions of records, personal papers, photographs, and audiovisual materials, including an original letter of the Guardian, 19 collections or additions to the archival papers of individuals, and some 227 linear feet of administrative records. Archives staff arranged and described more than 183 boxes of records and personal papers and 854 historical photographs, as well as architectural drawings, ephemera, and posters. The National Bahá'í Library, which is maintained by the Archives, continues to receive donations of books, pamphlets, and other printed materials, in addition to books acquired by purchase.

Administrative and personal records are increasingly being created in digital formats that can be challenging to manage over long periods of time. Archives staff are learning how to better preserve and provide access to digital materials, and to assist BNO agencies and Local Assemblies to better manage their own records. Good record keeping helps to enhance the capacity of Assemblies to carry out their many responsibilities on behalf of an expanding community. Because the records of today become the archives of the future, investment in good recordkeeping practices brings both near-term and future benefits. However, maintaining trustworthy digital records can be very challenging-especially in circumstances with inconsistent staffing—so the Archives continues to advise local Assemblies to retain copies of their most important documents on paper whenever possible.

Archives staff responded to 966 reference requests from individuals, Local Spiritual Assemblies, and the offices of the National Center during the past year. The Archives also hosted 14 visiting researchers, who worked on projects related to the lives of individual Bahá'ís and Bahá'í communities. The following books published during the past year credited the Archives with research assistance: *Aflame with Devotion* by Judy Hannen Moe; *John David Bosch* by Angelina Diliberto Allen; and *Visiting 'Abdu'l-Bahá Volume 1* by Earl Redman.

During the year, 910 visiting Bahá'ís viewed the Archives' displays of relics and historical photographs, including a special presentation of documents and relics arranged for the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the Birth of the Báb.

RESEARCH SERVICES

National Bahá'í

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The Archives is preparing to relocate from its longstanding quarters belowground at the House of Worship to a new location with enhanced systems for security, fire protection, and climate control. Work has begun to prepare the new facility for construction, and a special fund has been established to facilitate the move. The Archives expects to relocate to its new facility within the coming year.







Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project

he Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project began more than three decades ago, under the aegis of the National Spiritual Assembly and guided by the Universal House of Justice, as an effort to provide a reliable, comprehensive reference work on the Bahá'í Faith. In the 1980s, the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran was attracting extensive international attention, but published information on the Bahá'í Faith was scattered, fragmentary, and often inaccurate.

The task of producing an encyclopedia in one volume or a series of volumes initially faced formidable challenges on many fronts. Some were foreseen, others unexpected. Early in its second decade, the project's seemingly firm plan to publish a short A-Z encyclopedia in two volumes gave way to more provisional approaches in terms of both content and medium of publication. In December 2006, the Universal House of Justice approved the project's proposal to post an interim selection of articles online while development of the encyclopedia as a comprehensive and reliable reference

work continued. Those short- and long-term goals met another great challenge in late 2008, when, in response to the world economic crisis, the Encyclopedia Project was downsized. When its website was launched in April 2009, the project no longer had an editorial board or paid staff.

Bahai-encyclopedia-project.org offers a selection of signed articles—detailed, meticulously researched, and illustrated—of interest to Bahá'ís as well as to the wider public. Participants in study circles have commented that a number of the articles have proved especially useful in their learning process. The articles provide information that is often difficult to locate or that is unavailable in English elsewhere.

Each year the website attracts many thousands of readers from the United States and around the world. The overwhelming majority continue to be first-time visitors; during 2019-20, 85 percent have been new to the site. Like last year, some 65 percent of visitors have come from the United States. That percentage has decreased somewhat over time as more and more international visitors have discovered the site. This year nearly 12 percent, the next largest number, are from the United Kingdom. Visitors from Australia and Canada have increased substantially in the past two years. Hundreds more visitors are from non-English-speaking countries.

Once again this year, the two most-read articles are "Letters of the Living" by the editors and "Hands of the Cause of God" by Eunice Braun and the editors. The articles with the next largest numbers of readers this year are "Children" by Nancy A. Davis and the editors and "Mashriqu'l-Adhkár" by Dr. Julie Badiee and the editors. Inspiring biographies of early Bahá'ís are also popular. Currently, one of the most-read articles is Graham Hassall's

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he Encyclopedia Project has amassed hundreds of draft articles written by authors from around the world. From these a range of articles on history and biography, the literature of the Bahá'í Faith, and its laws, institutions, and teachings have been approved for final editing once the difficulties that have hindered further development of the project's Web presence can be overcome.



biography of Clara and Hyde Dunn (Mother and Father Dunn), who took the Bahá'í message from the United States to Australia exactly a century ago in response to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call in His Tablets of the Divine Plan.

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Since being downscaled a decade ago, the Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project has depended on earmarked contributions

and volunteer service to support its continued existence. Thus, the generosity of individual Bahá'ís is essential in both maintaining this unique reference work and eventually enabling it to develop further. Such generosity is clearly in line with the objectives of the series of Five Year Plans. "Far from being a diversion from the worldwide effort to advance the process of entry by troops," a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice in 2008 states, "Bahá'í scholarship can be a powerful reinforcement to that endeavour and a valuable source of new enquirers."

The Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project welcomes comments and inquiries (at encyclopedia@usbnc.org) and encourages visits to its website (at www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/).



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Office of Review

asked to recommend reviewers, and in some cases reviewers and authors may choose to consult with each other directly. The Review Office fosters this learning process and continues to address new questions in consultation with authors, artists, and reviewers, and in accordance with the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly.

he literature review process was initiated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a temporary measure to protect the Bahá'í Faith while in its early stages of development. This requirement has been continued to date by the Guardian and by the Universal House of Justice, which, in a letter dated December 29, 1988, wrote: "[F]ar from adopting a carefree attitude, the community must be conscious of the necessity to present a correct view of itself and an accurate understanding of its purpose to a largely skeptical public."

While still a temporary measure, prepublication review continues to ensure that works produced by Bahá'í authors and artists represent the Bahá'í Faith accurately and with dignity. A third criterion is timeliness—whether a work may endanger the friends in countries where they face persecution or be unwise to distribute for other reasons.

The review of literature and audiovisual materials (including films and music) is carried out by the Office of Review in collaboration with a growing network of reviewers around the country. Local Spiritual Assemblies are responsible for reviewing literature that is for local use only, as well as all "special materials" (such as artwork and graphic creations, greeting cards, jewelry, and T-shirts) produced by individuals in their jurisdiction, whether intended for local or national distribution. Publication of certain translations and historical documents is subject to additional protective approval requirements at the international level.

In general, the policy of review does not apply to the Internet medium, particularly personal Web pages and blogs, where content is amenable to easy change and revision, individual initiative is strongly encouraged, and learning through trial and error is valued. In the case of more formal online undertakings, such as e-books or articles in online journals with institutional sponsorship, the policy of review continues to apply.

A learning process

Among the aims of the Office are to nurture a consultative approach to review, to educate authors and artists new to the process about review standards and purposes, and to foster a spirit of collaboration among all involved. As the Universal House of Justice wrote in a letter dated December 10, 1992, Bahá'ís should look upon review "in this early stage in the development of the Faith [as] a species of peer review which they welcome, since it is primarily among their fellow Bahá'ís that they would find at this time those who would have sufficiently wide and deep understanding of the Faith and its Teachings to raise issues of importance which they would want to consider before publication."

The expanding, open-ended network of reviewers consists primarily of authors and artists who have themselves submitted materials for review, thus continually building our collective capacity as a community to uphold the review standards for accuracy and dignity across a wide diversity of fields. Authors are frequently asked to recommend reviewers, and in some cases reviewers and authors may choose to consult with each other directly. The Review Office fosters this learning process and continues to address new questions in consultation with authors, artists, and reviewers, and in accordance with the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Systems and statistics

The Review Office received 142 submissions during 2019–20, down seven percent from the previous year. All submissions are received in electronic form. Roughly 90 percent of submissions are literature; the rest are audiovisual materials. The wide variety

of items reviewed includes articles, chapters, nonfiction books, novels, encyclopedia entries, songs, poems, films, DVDs, CDs, children's materials, study guides, scripts, pamphlets, and sheet music.

Authors and artists are generally asked to allow about 12 weeks for review of a book, eight weeks for an article, and four weeks for a CD. Many reviews are completed more quickly, though some require longer, depending on the length and complexity of the work and the availability of reviewers. At any one time this year, approximately 36 new review cases were pending; correspondence, inquiries, and resubmissions came in a steady stream.

The diversity, range, and depth of materials being created by Bahá'í authors and artists includes work intended to contribute directly or indirectly to the community-building work of the Bahá'í community; to spiritual transformation; to public and academic discourse; and to informing new approaches to social action. It is a privilege to witness the creativity and devotion inspired by the message of Bahá'u'lláh, as expressed by the talented and dedicated believers with which this national Bahá'í community is blessed.

he Review Office received 142 submissions during 2019-20, down seven percent from the previous year. Roughly 90 percent of submissions are literature; the rest are audiovisual materials. The wide variety of items reviewed includes articles, chapters, nonfiction books, novels, encyclopedia entries, songs, poems, films, DVDs, CDs, children's materials, study guides, scripts, pamphlets, and sheet music.



Office of Operations

he Office of Operations coordinates business activities that support the vision, goals, and work of the National Spiritual Assembly and its subordinate offices and agencies. Its principal purpose is to ensure the organizational coherence and successful functioning of the Bahá'í National Organization (BNO). Toward this end, the chief operations officer (COO) accompanies managers, consultants, and strategic and operational task forces and committees. Central aims are to foster continuous improvement in interoffice communication, collaboration, organizational governance, and resource management.

Evolution of the Office and areas of focus

Since its creation in 2012, the functions of the Office have evolved in accordance with the guidance of the National Assembly and the learning continuously generated by BNO operations. Each step is taken with a certain milestone in mind related to objectives of the Office's mission and purpose, and with an eye to both contributing to the advancement of the organization and fulfilling the goals of the Five Year Plan.

The Office coordinates the work of key BNO staff and expert external resources, including Bahá'í-owned businesses, to advance a few lines of focused action, including the following:

- Facilitating independent quality assessment for the organization, utilizing expert resources with deep understandings of the institute process.
- Identifying information technology systems and applications that can support critical needs of the growing community, and ensuring effective utilization of those systems.
- Supporting various regional institutions in acquiring such facilities as training institute facilities, the need for which is emerging as increasing numbers of clusters are attaining the third milestone of growth.

In all its lines of action, the Office strives to maintain a service-minded focus, a creative sensibility, and utmost respect for the sacrificial contributions of the Bahá'í community—always mindful of preserving or creating environments that foster effective service by staff and volunteers.

As the Office of Operations has evolved, certain patterns have emerged in its work. Foremost, nearly every line of action taken is either in collaboration with or in support of other departments and with members of the BNO staff. Strategic plans that define this work and form the basis for assessing it always take into account the need to prepare the organization for the expansion of the national Bahá'í community. Indeed, the Office of Operations is unique within the BNO in acting in direct service to the organization's offices and departments. Nearly every strategy, every system, and every project involves advancing the capability of a department as a whole. Considerable fluidity and flexibility is therefore required in the Office's work, especially in the effort to accumulate knowledge that benefits future operations.

Reflections

The Office is looking ahead at a number of possibilities, with the common theme of leveraging a collaborative mode of operations to continually deliver greater value to the National Assembly and to the BNO. Continuing its conversations with the organization's offices and departments and with members of the national community is essential to the Office's work. While mindful of the wisdom of allowing things to develop organically, the Office continues to assess current operations, to anticipate needs, and to develop initiatives that build capacity and deliver measurable results that are simple, scalable, and sustainable.

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obile app is a new application designed to provide information to Bahá'ís, and secondarily to the public. It offers access to information frequently requested from the National Center, as an alternative

to providing it by email.

Office of Information Technology

he Office of Information
Technology (IT) provides
email services, file and print
services, local and long-distance
telephone services, help desk support,
reporting services, and a number of
enterprise applications for the offices
and agencies of the National Spiritual
Assembly, Local Spiritual Assemblies,
registered Bahá'í groups, individual
believers, and inquirers.

Enterprise applications

Enterprise applications such as the ones listed below provide electronic services and timely information to assist those serving at the national, regional, cluster, and community levels in their efforts to achieve the goals of the Five Year Plan:

- eBudget is used by offices and agencies of the National Spiritual Assembly to assist in planning and submitting annual budget requests.
- eMembership2 is the portal into the national community database for use by Local Spiritual Assemblies and registered Bahá'í groups.
- Event Registration provided online registration for various conferences in the past four years, and is being expanded to be an enterprisewide system that will allow for management of multiple concurrent events.
- Mobile app is a new application designed to provide information to Bahá'ís, and secondarily to the public. It offers access to information frequently requested from the National Center, as an alternative to providing it by email.
- My Profile, a self-service application, allows Bahá'ís to update and maintain their membership and contact information in the national database as well as to register their children.
- Online Registration is used by new believers to declare their belief in

Bahá'u'lláh and to register their children.

- **RTI Tracker** continues to be utilized by several Regional Training Institutes and cluster agencies to record and report participation in study circles and junior youth groups.
- Seeker Response System (SRS) is used by the Inquiry Services team and regional and cluster responders to record and manage contact with inquirers and online registrants.
- Statistical Report Program (SRP) is used by the National Statistics Office, regional and cluster statistics officers, and Area Teaching Committees to report local and cluster activity statistics to the Bahá'í World Center.
- UnityWeb is the portal used by national offices and agencies to maintain the national community database; track assignment of members to their respective Bahá'í localities and clusters; record who is serving in local, cluster, and regional roles; and track the status of Local Spiritual Assemblies and registered Bahá'í groups.

All these applications are supported by a network infrastructure that connects offices on the Wilmette and Evanston campus—which includes the Bahá'í House of Worship and Welcome Center, the Bahá'í National Center, and the Ḥaziratu'l-Quds—along with Bosch, Green Acre, and Louhelen Bahá'í Schools.

Maps and boundaries of over 36,000 Bahá'í localities are maintained based on current and constantly changing government jurisdictions.

Accomplishments in 2019–20

In the past year, the IT Office:

• Implemented a new mobile app for Bahá'ís and the public. Features include:

- ❖ Bahá'í prayers
- Latest guidance from senior institutions
- Notifications of new correspondence from senior institutions
- Assistance finding Bahá'í communities
- Access to My Profile
- Biometric log-in capability
- Audio playback feature for documents contained in the app
- An electronic version of the Bahá'í ID card
- Ability to search the national Guidance Library for similar terms
- A Spanish version (in progress)
- Upgraded the aging wireless network between Evanston and Wilmette buildings at the National Center to 10 gigabytes/second.
- Implemented a new ticketing/change management/purchasing system to increase efficiency in tracking and supporting requests.
- Expanded use of an internal security awareness program.
- Replaced the aging UPS (uninterruptible power supply) for servers.
- Revised IP network addressing to follow a standardized format.
- Implemented a new content management system (CMS) for Web content.
- Released an upgraded version of the member services website (at <u>bahai.us/community/</u>), including a new search feature capable of searching all content in the CMS.
- Continued work on a new system for Fund Development.
- Continued work on a new system to replace the Seeker Response System for Inquiry Services.

- Assisted several departments as they began using business intelligence and data analytics to evaluate the results of department initiatives.
- Began automating many manual tasks historically associated with document management.
- Managed more than 660 mass email distributions.
- Began gathering requirements for a new financial system.
- Collaborated with the Bahá'í World Center on the rollout of the new Web-based version of SRP 3.0.
- Continued improving Reporting Services to allow users to generate their own reports.
- Implemented an automated process to scan and file older documents waiting for entry into the document management system.
- Added 200 terabytes of storage for audio and video files.
- Implemented a Geographic Information System (GIS) application supporting interactive maps based on administrative boundaries, supporting features of the bahai.us website and the mobile app.
- Created special mapping applications for Unit Convention planning, BNO departments, and some Regional Bahá'í Councils.
- Upgraded the email system.
- Implemented a new Hyper-V high-availability cluster.

OFFICE OF MEMBERSHIP AND RECORDS

The Office of Membership and Records, a section of the IT Office, is responsible for maintaining the official records for all Bahá'ís, Local Spiritual Assemblies, and registered groups in the US Bahá'í community. As part of these duties, the Office:

 Processes enrollments, child registrations, and international transfers to and from the United States. mong many
accomplishments,
the IT Office implemented
a Geographic Information
System (GIS) application
supporting interactive maps
based on administrative
boundaries, supporting
features of the bahai.us
website and the mobile
app. It created special
mapping applications for
Unit Convention planning,
BNO departments, and some
Regional Bahá'í Councils.

This year the Office uploaded 26,443 items into the national database, including more than 17,000 address or name changes. Since September 2018, the Office has worked with about 500 local communities in a campaign to update and improve accuracy in the national membership database. So far 1,945 updates have resulted from this campaign.

- Records marriages, addresses, and verification of deaths.
- Issues Bahá'í ID cards for all new enrollees, youths turning 15, and new arrivals to the US community, as well as replacing cards on request.
- Captures correspondence by individuals and institutions with the National Spiritual Assembly and its various offices and agencies.

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Education of the community

Outreaches continue to educate the US Bahá'í community on what this Office does and how it can assist believers with their local administrative tasks. Information booths at the 2019 Bahá'í National Convention and the Grand Canyon Bahá'í Conference helped serve this purpose, and feedback from them helped the Office improve its support to local communities.

eMembership2 Webinars

The Office has initiated 49 webinars involving 680 members of 467 Local Spiritual Assemblies, orienting them to the use of eMembership2 to keep records up to date and assist in other administrative

tasks. Webinars have dealt with Ridván elections, international transfers and child registrations, and lesser-known features of eMembership2.

Address Update Campaign

Since September 2018, the Office has worked with about 500 local communities in a campaign to update and improve accuracy in the national membership database (*see table below*). So far 1,945 updates have resulted from this campaign, which has benefited from much effort by individuals and local task forces, and has stimulated intercommunity cooperation.

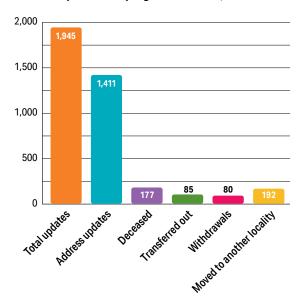
My Profile

This Office frequently promotes My Profile as a tool empowering US Bahá'ís to update their information in the national database, register their children, and gain information about their local community. In many phone and email contacts, believers are encouraged to use My Profile, especially new enrollees, believers turning 15, and those transferring into the national community.

Mapping of Indian reservations

A multiyear study by IT's mapping specialist has resulted in a comprehensive update of how localities on Indian reservations are recorded in national records. This Office updated 29 community names, marked 129 existing records as being on reservations, and recorded 189 newly identified localities.

Address update campaign results • September 2018–February 2020



Logistics and Support Services

he Office of Logistics and Support Services has operated since administrative year 2016-17 to assist offices and agencies of the Bahá'í National Organization (BNO) in consolidating and coordinating resources, aiming toward greater efficiency and effective cost management. A primary objective is to establish a national procurement and purchasing function. Daily operations include oversight of the Meetings and Events, Mailroom Services, and Front Desk operations at the Bahá'í National Center.

Purchasing

Continuing development of a national procurement office has the goal of achieving concentrated purchasing power at lower cost. BNO offices and departments continue to become more efficient in meeting their diverse purchasing needs. Systematic efforts to build on these advances are underway in the areas of purchasing furniture, office supplies, and food services, among others. The Office continues to explore this endeavor in coordination with the Properties, Finance, and Information Technology offices.

Meetings and Events

The Office of Meetings and Events strives to create, design, plan, and execute events providing excellence in all facets of hospitality. The Office manages many logistical details pertaining to events that occur multiple times a year, such as the meetings of the National Spiritual Assembly, BNO staff reflection gatherings, and Assembly Special Visits; annual events, including the Bahá'í National Convention, the Bahá'í Choral Festival, and the Arab American Conference; Board meetings and other gatherings serving the

Huqúqu'lláh Trust, the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP), the Wilmette Institute, the Persian Bahá'í Media Service, and Regional Training Institutes; and Treasurer's Office fundraising events.

The Office regularly conducts evaluations and research regarding vendors to supply the BNO with the best possible services at the most reasonable cost.

Mailroom Services

Processing of incoming and outgoing mail continues to constitute most of the Mailroom's functions, including a few bulk-mailing projects processed in-house. The Mailroom also processes custom print jobs from various BNO departments, in cases when this is more cost-efficient than the use of offsite printers.

Front Desk

The Front Desk staffer continues to learn more about BNO offices and departments, with an eye toward assisting them as needed. In the spirit of shared learning, this employee assists with the purchasing function while others are being trained to occasionally attend to the daily business of the Front Desk.

In the coming year, Logistics and Support Services will continue to cross-train staff to serve in all four areas: purchasing, Meetings and Events, Mailroom, and Front Desk duties. In this spirit of service, staff will support all areas of the Office to meet the needs of the National Spiritual Assembly and its offices and agencies.

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Logistics and Support
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Spiritual Assembly and
its offices and agencies.

Properties Office

In an effort to preserve furniture original to the oldest-standing Bahá'í Temple, the Office decided to restore the Auditorium's historic seating, which contractors estimated would cost more than \$450,000. In a demonstration of devotion and passion for service, Properties staff asked to repair and upholster the over 1,200 chairs themselves-in addition to their other daily duties-which reduced costs by over \$200,000.

he National Properties Office is responsible for the stewardship of all properties owned by the National Spiritual Assembly.
To that end, the Properties team manages and carries out projects related to architecture, construction, maintenance, restoration, repairs, housekeeping, and landscape. The team's goal is to create beautiful and safe environments for prayer, learning, and service.

Bahá'í House of Worship

Improving the seating and sound system and finding ways to reduce costs are driving the Office's work at the House of Worship. In an effort to preserve furniture original to the oldest-standing Bahá'í Temple, the Office decided to restore the Auditorium's historic seating, which contractors estimated would cost more than \$450,000. In a demonstration of devotion and passion for service, Properties staff asked to repair and upholster the over 1,200 chairs themselves—in addition to their other daily duties-which reduced costs by over \$200,000. The team hopes to complete the project by early summer 2020.



The Properties Office is also moving forward with plans for a new sound system for the Temple Auditorium. New audio equipment should begin being installed in late spring 2020, with completion by late summer. The upgrade includes new speakers, microphones, easy-to-operate audio control equipment, and the technology to capture higher quality recordings of devotional and choral services.

The cost to heat and cool the House of Worship continues to be enormous. When the 16-story glass-domed Auditorium was originally constructed, utility costs were low, and builders did not consider thermal insulation. Combined Temple utility costs can now exceed





\$24,000 a month. The new Welcome Center, as a LEED-compliant structure, demonstrates the immense savings available when the latest building technology is employed: monthly utility costs at the Welcome Center are lower than those for most homes immediately adjacent to the Temple property.

In keeping with this, all lighting in the interior of the Auditorium and on the exterior and grounds of the Temple has been replaced with efficient LED fixtures. Still, the replacement of obsolete and failing Temple windows, which provide almost no thermal insulation, will result in the most significant energy savings. According to outside engineering firms, thermally protected windows will pay for themselves within a little more than a decade. New windows would also provide ultraviolet light protection to Auditorium furnishings that have continually faded and needed replacing in the past.

Further, mechanical engineers are planning to bring air silently from the top of the Auditorium back to floor level through hidden ducts, creating inexpensive supplemental heating. The Office hopes that window replacement and heating improvements can begin at the Temple in the year 2021–22.

The Office has also assumed responsibility for maintaining the 12

Temple fountains, which saves over \$25,000 a year, and seeks to reduce landscape maintenance costs by seven percent in 2020 by arranging less-costly floral displays, reducing the quantity of flowers planted, and using more perennials. The team uses only organic methods to maintain the gardens, eschewing pesticides or other chemicals. Further, a large cistern installed under one of the Temple gardens collects storm water and reuses it for irrigation.

Welcome Center

The Properties Office recently installed new audiovisual equipment that allows visitors to request a variety of videos in multiple languages. The equipment will, in the future, also allow the Welcome Center to stream presentations online.

National Bahá'í Archives

In coordination with the National Bahá'í Archives and outside consultants, the Properties Office will, in summer 2020, receive and decide upon construction proposals for a new archival facility. The goal is to provide state-of-the-art protection for thousands of documents, artifacts, and sacred objects. The facility will include rooms in which scholars can do research in comfortable, secure spaces, and archivists will have more room to restore, document, and digitize the prodigious collection.

echanical engineers are planning to bring air silently from the top of the Auditorium back to floor level through hidden ducts, creating inexpensive supplemental heating. The Office hopes that window replacement and heating improvements can begin at the Temple in the year 2021–22.

At schools, institutes, and historic properties, emphasis has been on replacing outdated electrical and mechanical systems with modern, long-lasting equipment that reduces energy usage and requires fewer repairs. Meanwhile, structural enhancements emphasize long-term durability and reduced operating costs.

Bahá'í National Center offices in Evanston

The Properties Office is pursuing an ongoing systematic plan to update the Bahá'í National Center. Starting in March 2020, contractors installed new phone and data conduits throughout the building, along with new LED lighting that provides healthier daylight spectrum illumination while reducing energy and repair costs. Further renovations are on course for the next two years—including major repairs to the roof and to electrical and plumbing systems.

Adjacent strategic properties

Over the past four years, the Office has assisted in the purchase and restoration of three residential properties in the immediate vicinity of the House of Worship, all of which have been profitably leased. In addition, the National Spiritual Assembly has purchased nearby commercial real estate in anticipation of future expansion needs. With the help

of a commercial property management company, over 90 percent of this commercial property is currently leased.

Bahá'í schools and historic properties

In coordination with the Office of Education and Schools, the Properties Office organizes and prioritizes capital projects for each Bahá'í center of learning. Recently, emphasis has been on replacing outdated electrical and mechanical systems with modern, long-lasting equipment that reduces energy usage and requires fewer repairs. Meanwhile, structural enhancements emphasize long-term durability and reduced operating costs. Repairs and enhancements are continually being implemented at all schools, institutes, and historic properties so that these places provide uplifting, beautiful environments to worship, learn, facilitate outreach, and provide community service.



Public Safety

he Public Safety department is staffed by 11 full-time public safety officers, including an operations lieutenant who assists in the day-to-day operations and administration of the department. Officers are responsible for the safety and security of all properties and staff members working at the Bahá'í National Center. Public Safety is a uniformed service providing 24-hour, seven-days-a-week security. Officers' duties include vehicle and foot patrols of all properties, several times a day, as well as the provision of special transportation services. Their friendly and courteous interaction with visitors ensures that all quests appreciate the standards of behavior necessary to maintain the serene spiritual atmosphere that pervades the Bahá'í House of Worship Auditorium and gardens. In collaboration with the Information Technology and Properties offices, Public Safety is currently in the process of upgrading its access control and surveillance equipment to ensure that Bahá'í properties are protected by a state-of-the-art security system.

During 2019–20, the Public Safety department provided security for both the 111th Bahá'í National Convention and the 13th Annual Choral Music Festival. The department continues to provide "active shooter" training for all personnel serving at the Bahá'í National Center, and a "Run, Hide, Fight" video is also continually accessible on the Bahá'í National Organization's Intranet site. Fire drills were conducted at all Bahá'í National Center buildings in August 2019, with the assistance of and advice from both the Wilmette and Evanston Fire Departments.

The Public Safety department strives to maintain its professionalism through training. Its chief and his operations lieutenant attended Red Cross training for adult and pediatric CPR/AED last year. In the year ahead, the department will continue to enhance its professionalism through a culture of learning and collaboration with other departments within the Bahá'í National Center and outside agencies.

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Association for Bahá'í Studies-North America

ponsored by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada and operating under its aegis, the Association for Bahá'í Studies-North America (ABS) fosters the application of complementary insights from science and religion to the evolution of thought in academic and professional fields.

With an Executive Committee including members of the United States Bahá'í community and in collaboration with this National Assembly and many friends and supporters in the US, the Association creates spaces for the generation and dissemination of research across a variety of disciplines by supporting collaborative research initiatives, seminars, conferences, and publications.

Evolution of the ABS annual conference

In 2019, the Association held its 43rd annual conference during August 9–12 in Ottawa, Ontario, bringing together some 1,400 participants from the United States, Canada, and 15 other countries. In an effort to continue the process of reimagining the conference, the program included the following features:

- Workshops exploring participation in academic and professional discourses
- Plenary sessions highlighting:
 - Different methods of generating knowledge
 - ❖ The special role of the arts
 - The connection between community-building activities and intellectual inquiry, including a presentation by Mr. Stephen Birkland, a member of the Universal House of Justice
 - ❖ A parallel youth conference

The conference also included two pre-conference seminars on, respectively, liberalism and propaganda. These organized spaces were dedicated to rigorous

study and conversation among individuals connected to and involved in these discourse areas. Based on this positive experience, ABS will increase the number of similar seminars offered in 2020 and rearrange the conference schedule to accommodate them, along with other spaces meant to foster the advancement of small, focused group projects. The full conference program and plenary videos are available on the ABS website (at https://bahai-studies.ca).

Working groups grow in scope and complexity

At the 2019 annual conference, several working groups presented breakout sessions and held gatherings. Conveners of working and small project groups compiled narratives to capture experiences and lines of learning in preparation for a meeting attended by Mr. Stephen Birkland and other members of senior institutions of the Bahá'í Faith.

Learning generated by working groups and their related processes informed a revision of workshop materials used at the conference. These materials have now been further refined for use in metropolitan areas, which reflects a growing focus on decentralized activities that draw more people into ABS from specific populations.

In addition to activity at the annual conference, a regional working group seminar in March 2019 in Toronto focused on education; a second, in April at Green Acre Bahá'í School in Eliot, Maine, focused on health. In winter 2020, there were fewer regional seminars than in previous years, with the exception of a gathering focused on health. This decrease is due to changes in the cohort of conveners and to a focus on conference-related seminars for summer 2020.

Within working groups, subgroups have chosen to investigate particular discourses and explore contributions that

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Learning generated by working groups and their related processes informed a revision of workshop materials used at the conference. These materials have now been further refined for use in metropolitan areas, which reflects a growing focus on decentralized activities that draw more people into ABS from specific populations.

The ABS Executive Committee is developing a process to provide financial and consultative support for gatherings that facilitate intensive collaborative work. Seminar planning groups are expected to make use of this opportunity.



can be made from a Bahá'í perspective. Objects of learning in this area relate to how to bring people into the conversation so they can identify questions or projects they wish to pursue, how to help groups sustain efforts at the level of intensity necessary for advancement, how to accompany groups, and how to encourage depth and rigor. The ABS Executive Committee is developing a process to provide financial and consultative support for gatherings that facilitate intensive collaborative work. Seminar planning groups are expected to make use of this opportunity.

Finally, conveners of working groups gathered online in June as part of an ongoing series. This year, a number of conveners have needed to step back, so clear priorities include fostering the capacity of conveners and building a pool of close collaborators able to support conveners and step in when needed.

Publications

ABS published three issues of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*: Volumes 28.4, 29.1–2, and 29.3. The *Journal* is available online for no charge, significantly increasing accessibility to articles and inviting wider participation in scholarly exchange.

The Editorial Committee of the Wilfrid Laurier University Press (WLUP) Bahá'í Studies Series—now named "Bahá'í Studies Publications"—is exploring the possibility of publishing in-house books that do not fit the guidelines for WLUP Bahá'í Series submissions.

Finances

The ABS annual budget is primarily supported through conference fees and by the National Bahá'í Funds of Canada and the United States.

Association of the Friends of Persian Culture

Background

n 1991, the National Spiritual Assembly's Persian-American Affairs Office established an organization devoted to the promotion of Persian arts and culture. Later, the name of the organization was changed to the Association of the Friends of Persian Culture. The Association is a nonprofit organization operating under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Objectives

The main objectives of the Association are to engage in:

Discourse and dialogue. Among lines of action:

- Strive to make the organization's annual conference a unique occasion for dialogue and substantive discourse with like-minded Iranian individuals, groups, and organizations, as well as people of capacity at every level, on matters of importance to the future of Iran and the welfare of society.
- Help dispel misconceptions about the Bahá'í Faith and continue to build a bridge of love, trust, and understanding with Iranians of every background.
- Seek to stimulate genuine conversation among Iranians of different religions, ethnicities, and ideologies on some of the most challenging issues facing Iran and the world, such as the equality of women and men, human rights, elimination of prejudice, equity and justice, race unity, and the role of religion in society.

Celebration of Iranian culture. Among lines of action:

- Promote and celebrate the diverse facets of Persian arts and culture.
- Provide an opportunity for Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í artists

- to share their talents with an audience that loves and respects the cultural heritage of Iran.
- Provide an opportunity for Bahá'í children and youth of Iranian descent to become more familiar with and enjoy their cultural heritage.

Community building and social action.Among lines of action:

- Create an opportunity for conference participants to familiarize themselves with the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith as practiced by the worldwide Bahá'í community.
- Provide information about the community-building activities and social action efforts of Bahá'ís throughout the world.
- Provide an opportunity for conference participants to experience firsthand the joyous, courteous, friendly, and inspiring atmosphere of Bahá'í gatherings.
- Further enhance the transformative and unifying spirit of the conference by continually improving the quality of devotionals.

Activities

Annual conference. The Association organized and conducted its 29th annual conference during Labor Day weekend 2019, at the Renaissance Hotel and Convention Center in the Chicago suburb of Schaumburg. The conference program included, on its opening night, a loving welcome and expression of support from the National Spiritual Assembly, delivered by one of its members, Dr. Muin Afnani.

The 2019 conference again saw a high number of participants, drawing 2,400 lranians from across the United States and the Americas, as well as from Europe, Australia, Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia.

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Video recordings of many of the 2019 conference presentations are available on YouTube. In addition, CDs and DVDs of talks and artistic performances are available for purchase.

Presentations by a group of eminent Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í Iranian scholars on the general theme of "Glimpses of Persian Culture"—and on the subtheme of "Glory of Iran"—were both thought-provoking and inspirational. Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri, Dr. Mandana Zandian, Dr. Abbas Milani, Dr. Saba Ayman, Dr. Nader Saeidi, Dr. Farah Dustdar, Mr. Sharouz Tedjarati, Ms. Masih Alinejad, Mr. Soheil Kamali, Mr. Pejman Akbarzadeh, and Mr. Hessam Abrishami were among speakers.

Artistic performances included poetry, music, drama, and dance. The Avaye Sarzameen Ensemble, Ms. Bushra Azari, Mr. Rahim Shahriari, the Ahdi and Pezhvak Ensemble, Mr. Ardavan Mofid, Mr. Shahrokh Moshkin, Mr. Manouchehr Vahman, Mr. Rezvanollah Tavakoli, and Mr. Aref Arefkia were among some of the prominent artists and performers.

Other well-received features of the program were a screening of Mr. Maziar Bahari's documentary *Education Is Not a Crime*, Mr. Steve Sarowitz's film *The Gate*, and a showing of the second installment of the documentary film *Hope from Iran 2*.

Publications and dissemination of conference programs. Video recordings of many of the 2019 conference presentations are available on YouTube. In addition, CDs and DVDs of talks and artistic performances are available for purchase.

Finances

Consistent with its status as a nonprofit corporation, the Association's sources of income include registration fees for the annual conferences, sales of materials, and contributions from individuals. In recent years, the National Spiritual Assembly has provided some financial assistance to ensure the Association is able to maintain the high quality of its programming and event management.

Review and reflection

The Board of Directors of the Association of the Friends of Persian Culture continuously reviews and reflects on both the vision and mission of the Association.

A summary of the Board's most recent observations includes the following:

The annual conference has evolved significantly since its inception, particularly over the past 12 years, because of the participation of prominent non-Bahá'í Iranians who have joyfully accepted to present and participate in social discourse with Bahá'ís on a variety of topics.

Presentations by prominent scholars at the conference, such as the late Dr. Ehsan Yarshater, Dr. Abbas Milani, Dr. Farzaneh Milani, Dr. Mehdi Khalaji, Dr. Farhang Mehr, Dr. Arash Naraghi, and Mrs. Mehrangiz Kar, as well as media personalities such as Mr. Parviz Sayyad, Mr. Dariush Karimi, Mr. Alireza Maybodi, Mr. Siamak Dehghanpour, Dr. Mohsen Sazegara, and Mrs. Massih Alinejad, to name but a few, have contributed immensely to heightening the level of interest of the Iranian Diaspora in the conference. The Board is aware that the proceedings of these conferences are closely followed by many in Iran.

The support of the National Spiritual Assembly, as well as generous contributions by some dedicated individuals have greatly enhanced conference programming, planning, and management.

Bahá'í Center Assistance Corporation

he Bahá'í Center Assistance Corporation (BCA) is a nonprofit agency established by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. Since 2005, its mission has been to support the growth and development of the Faith by providing a systematic program of education, training, and technical assistance to communities whose goal is to lease, purchase, build, or maintain existing Bahá'í Centers.

BCA continues to offer its assistance to communities for consultation, either in person or by conference call. BCA Board members have skills in areas such as property acquisition, design and construction, facilities management, financing, accounting, law, architecture, conflict resolution, and nonprofit management.

BCA helps communities to realize the potential of their Bahá'í Centers and other properties in support of meeting the goals of the Five Year Plan and advancing the process of entry by troops. BCA's Technical Assistance Manual continues to be a resource for communities in leasing, acquiring, and maintaining Bahá'í facilities. It provides communities with a blueprint for systematically assessing their readiness to operate a center and the feasibility of their doing so. Additional materials found in the manual assist with planning and organization, financing, legal matters, construction and renovation, and property management. The Technical Assistance Manual may be downloaded from the BCA website (at http://www. bahaicenterassistance.org/).

Further, BCA created the *Emergency Operations Planning Manual for Spiritual Assemblies* in 2017 and installed it on the BCA website. This document is designed to assist Local Spiritual Assemblies as they develop plans for operating properties in the event of an emergency. To provide further assistance, a webinar on the same topic was offered to Local

Assemblies and registered Bahá'í groups on January 22 and March 17 of this year. A recording of the webinar will soon be made available on the BCA website.

BCA continues to manage and update data in the Bahá'í Center Database, which resides at the Bahá'í National Center.

This database can be accessed through UnityWeb and eMembership2. The fields in the database have been updated to include information requested by the Bahá'í World Center's Office for the Development of Administrative Systems. Local Spiritual Assemblies can add facilities and update various information about them, including uploading pictures and ownership documents through eMembership2.

During the year 2019–20, BCA accomplished the following:

- Held 15 committee meetings by telephone conference call.
- Toured a variety of Bahá'í Centers to better understand the opportunities and challenges communities have encountered in acquiring and operating properties.
- Consulted with eight communities, either in person or by telephone conferencing.
- Responded to inquiries from 19 communities and individuals.
- Collaborated with the National Spiritual Assembly to assist Regional Bahá'í Councils, Area Teaching Committees, and Local Spiritual Assemblies in determining when an Institute facility is needed to support communities.

Details can be found on the BCA website (at www.bahaicenterassistance.org). BCA can also be contacted via email (at info@bahaicenterassistance.org), telephone (847-425-7940), fax (847-425-7941), or surface mail (Bahá'í Center Assistance, 1233 Central St., Evanston IL 60201-1611).

CA continues to manage and update data in the Bahá'í Center Database, which resides at the Bahá'í National Center. This database can be accessed through UnityWeb and eMembership2. Local Spiritual Assemblies can add facilities and update various information about them, including uploading pictures and ownership documents through eMembership2.

During 2019–20, the Bahá'í Service for the Blind added five new audio recordings, seven new Braille titles, and eight new large-print items. In addition, 12 existing Braille titles were converted to the new Unified English Braille code. This continuing conversion project is on schedule but will require several years to complete.

Bahá'í Service for the Blind

his past year, the Bahá'í Service for the Blind continued to fulfill its primary responsibility to provide the literature of the Faith in various media to those who are unable to use normal print due to a disability. The three media currently available through the Service are Braille, audio recordings in MP3 format, and large print. During 2019–20, the Service added five new audio recordings, seven new Braille titles, and eight new largeprint items. In addition, 12 existing Braille titles were converted to the new Unified English Braille code. This continuing conversion project is on schedule but will require several years to complete.

The Service also provided for sale or for free upload 26 large-print books, 19 audio books, and 83 Braille books.

The Service makes a lending library of audio and Braille materials available to Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike. The library loaned 10 titles this year and provides *The American Bahá'í* in MP3 format at no charge to those who need it.

The work of the Service is carried out entirely by volunteers. Its website (at www.BahaiServiceForTheBlind.org) provides information about its work and an up-to-date listing of all available materials.

Health for Humanity

to inspire and motivate both local communities and global resources to improve health through the execution, in various settings, of medical service, clinical training, and health education projects with a sharp and carefully defined focus.

The organization continues to be inspired and assisted by guidance from the Bahá'í World Center on the most effective methods of social and economic development, and has aimed to serve as an instrument through which the health of people everywhere can, ultimately, be improved.

Now in its 28th year, Health for Humanity continues its efforts to advance discourse in the broader health community on health and with medical service and health education initiatives on social action.

Board and staff strive to strengthen institutional capacity via:

- Administrative and financial development.
- Improved web and social media presence.
- Systematic contact with members and like-minded organizations.
- Exploration of strategic support to Bahá'í youth projects related to health.
- Contribution to discourse on health for future Bahá'í generations.
- Development of potential pathways for HH members to conduct service in the healthcare arena.

Now in its 28th year, Health for Humanity continues its efforts to advance discourse in the broader health community on health and with medical service and health education initiatives on social action.



Annual Report of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace, University of Maryland

he Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland, College Park, is an endowed academic program dedicated to advancing interdisciplinary study and discourse on global peace. The mission of the Bahá'í Chair, as described in its founding documents in 1993, is "to initiate public forums for discussing the issues proposed in the Statement of the Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*." The contents of this statement provide the guiding charter for the work carried out by the Bahá'í Chair.

The Bahá'í Chair believes that when the world appears to unravel, we fight harder for peace. When identity creates chasms between groups of people, we must shine a light on pathways toward shared identity. When prejudice, whether based in race, ethnicity, or gender, blinds us, we must engage in discourse centered in human diversity and our common humanity. In 2013, the Chair implemented a mission of promoting the vision for world peace through an intensive learning process focused on five central themes:

- Structural racism and the root causes of prejudice
- · Human nature
- Empowerment of women and peace
- Frontiers of global governance and leadership
- Overcoming challenges in the globalization of the environment

In 2019, the Chair held two major conferences, five expert lectures, and two symposia. More than 1,000 people in total attended these events on the University of Maryland (UMD) campus, and almost 9,000 from around the world viewed them on The Bahá'í Chair for

World Peace <u>YouTube channel</u>. Since 2013, Chair events have been attended by more than 5,000 individuals and have been viewed online by over 40,000 people.

Lectures and symposia

The following is a list of the Bahá'í Chair lectures and symposia held during the academic year 2019–20. Event videos are posted online on the Bahá'í Chair's website (at http://bahaichair.umd.edu/).

The academic year began with a major conference, *Women in the World: Time for a New Paradigm for Peace*. The conference featured 16 invited academics and practitioners from all over the world. The conference was dedicated to examining the critical relationship between women's equality and advancement as a prerequisite to prosperous and peaceful societies.

On October 10, Dr. Alondra Nelson, president of the Social Science Research Council and professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, was the speaker at the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace Annual Lecture. Dr. Nelson gave a galvanizing talk on the role of government in guaranteeing the well being of all citizens.

On October 24, Dr. Sacoby Wilson—associate professor and director of the Program on Community Engagement, Environmental Justice, and Health, at the Maryland Institute for Applied Environmental Health, School of Public Health at UMD—gave a lecture on "Environmental Racism and Slavery in 21st Century Jim Crow America: Stories of Resistance, Hope, and Change."

On November 11, Dr. Kevin Roy, associate professor of family science at UMD, spoke about "Man up? Toxic

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n October 10, Dr.
Alondra Nelson,
president of the Social
Science Research Council
and professor at the
Institute for Advanced
Study in Princeton, New
Jersey, was the speaker
at the Bahá'í Chair for
World Peace Annual
Lecture. Dr. Nelson gave
a galvanizing talk on the
role of government in
guaranteeing the well
being of all citizens.

n April 14, the Chair is scheduled to host its first virtual conference, "The Global Climate Crisis: Seeking Solutions." Six speakers from across the globe are to examine the challenges of climate change and of seeking solutions.

Masculinities and the Health of Men, Women, and Children."

On February 4, "Discarding Hate: A Conversation with Derek Black and Rebecca Shankman" was co-hosted with the Critical Race Initiative. Mr. Black is the subject of a 2018 book by Eli Saslow, Rising Out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist.

On February 25, Dr. Christina Getrich, assistant professor and director of graduate studies with the UMD Department of Anthropology, gave a lecture titled "The Immigration Officers are always around!": US Immigration Enforcement and Ethnoracial Profiling in Immigrant Communities."

Originally scheduled for April 6, a lecture titled "Life after the Gunshot: A Digital Storytelling Project on the Impact of Structural and Interpersonal Violence and the Healing Process for Young Black Men," by Dr. Joseph Richardson Jr.—the Joel and Kim Feller Professor in the Departments of African–American Studies and Anthropology, and professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health at UMD—was postponed until the fall semester.

On April 14, the Chair is scheduled to host its first virtual conference, "The Global Climate Crisis: Seeking Solutions." Six speakers from across the globe are to examine the challenges of climate change and of seeking solutions.

Publications

In 2019, the Bahá'í Chair published two major academic books and one scholarly article:

- Hoda Mahmoudi & Michael L. Penn, eds., Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Human Dignity and Human Rights, Emerald Group Publishing.
- Hoda Mahmoudi & Steven Mintz, eds., Children & Globalization: Multidisciplinary Perspectives, Routledge Publishing.

• Hoda Mahmoudi, "Freedom and the Iranian Women's Movement," *Contexts Magazine*, Summer 2019.

Other activities

In March 2019, Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi, incumbent professor of the Bahá'í Chair, and Dr. Kate Seaman, assistant director of the Chair, hosted a roundtable at the ISA Annual Conference in Toronto titled "Re-envisioning the Foundations of International Relations: Innovation, Progress, Inclusivity, and Commonality."

In June, Dr. Mahmoudi and Dr. Seaman hosted a panel at the CEEISA-ISA Joint International Conference in Belgrade, Serbia, on the theme "Legitimacy, Authority, and Order in an Age of Anxiety."

In September, Dr. Mahmoudi conducted a series of workshops in Medford, Grants Pass, and Ashland, Oregon, titled "In Search of Solutions to the Blight of Racial Prejudice in America."

In October, Dr. Mahmoudi gave a lecture at Wofford College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, titled "The Problem of Structural Racism: An Obstacle to Peace."

In October, Dr. Mahmoudi gave a lecture at Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, titled "The Equality of Women: A Precondition to International Peace."

In March, Dr. Mahmoudi and Dr. Seaman hosted a roundtable at the ISA Annual Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, titled "Crossing Divides and Building Community in International Relations."

Appendix:

Membership of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 2019-2020

Muin Afnani Fariba Aqhdasi Kenneth E. Bowers, Secretary Juana C. Conrad, Treasurer Robert C. Henderson Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, Vice Chair David F. Young, Chair

Kevin Trotter

Rabi Musah

Membership of the Regional Bahá'í Councils in the United States

Appalachian States

Aram Ferdowsi, Chair Jacqueline Jenkins Riaz Khadem Laura Alison McGee Elizabeth Price, Secretary Bita Rahmanian, Treasurer Lenley Craig Turner, Vice Chair

Atlantic States

Taraneh Akhavan, Treasurer **Tod Ewing** Jerome Green, Secretary Navid Haghighi Eric Johnson Behzad Mazloom Nelufar Mohajeri, Chair Peter Oldziey, Vice Chair Corinne Perry

State of California

Cynthia Adlparvar, Vice Chair Payam Adlparvar Farzin Aghdasi, Secretary Jeffrey Albert Samir Delchad Randolph Dobbs Chitra Golestani-Maghzi, Chair Charleen Maghzi-Ader, Recording Secretary Sana Rezai, Treasurer

Four Corners States

Douglas Allen, Chair Jerry Bathke Carol Brooks Gregory Hatayama Jennifer North Morris, Secretary Julianne Redson-Smith, Treasurer Jan Saeed Soheila Shahidi Timothy Wood

Heartland States

Nadia Ayoubzadeh, Chair Dianne Bohannon-Letzer, Treasurer George Davis, Secretary Hoda Kemp Steven Lonning Rebecca Rice, Vice Chair Elma Strom, Recording Secretary

Midwestern States

David Douglas, Secretary Meghan McCullough, Vice Chair Marylou Miller, Chair **Tucker Myers** Karen Pollock, Recording Secretary Roi Qualls, Treasurer Oliver Thomas

Northeastern States

Nader Anvari, Vice Chair Tabassom Anvari, Chair Carey Corea Nina Dini, Assistant Secretary Marie McNair, Secretary Joel Nizin, Treasurer Vickie Nizin Michael Penn, Recording Secretary

Northern Plains States

Nasser Rohani

Fitzgerald Clark, Chair Stacey Firestone Margaret Dru Hanich, Secretary Mondana Heern, Treasurer Serge Van Neck

Northwestern States

Mauricio Brizuela Henri Cross Adel Faridani, Chair Todd Kutches Lonnie Locke Omid Meshkin, Treasurer David Simmons, Recording Secretary Erica Toussaint-Brock, Secretary Elahe Vahdat Young, Vice Chair

Prairie States

Vicki Abel Solomon Atkins Susan Bishop, Secretary Chad Dumas, Vice Chair Marcia Gitchell, Treasurer Sahba Jalali Billie Mayo, Chair Martha Rabbani Mark Scheffer

South Central States

Allison Ashley Susan Hansen, Chair Fereidoun Homayoun Sandy Huening Bahram Jalalizadeh Nadia Moayyad, Vice Chair Regina Rafraf, Secretary Sina Sabet Sarvestani, Recording Secretary Mark Sherrill, Treasurer

Southeastern States

Linda Ahdieh Grant Danita Brown, Vice Chair Riaz Khadem **Gregory Kintz** Nabil Kleinhenz, Secretary Akwanza Mangum, Chair Michael O'Neal Andrea Perkins, Recording Secretary Hooman Rafiee, Treasurer

Appendix:

Membership of key consultative and directorial bodies

Wilmette Institute Advisory Committee

Nesreen Akhtarkhavari

Jeffrey Albert Nicola Daniels John Hicks

Cathy Higgins Mark Rossman Boyd Staszewski

Robert Stockman, Director

Investment Committee

Douglas Henck Grant Kvalheim Cameron Maguire Stephen Vaccaro

National Properties Advisory Task Force

Danita Brown Brad La Rue

Marcus Reese McKerley

Affiliates' boards and executive committees

Association for Bahá'í Studies-North America Executive Committee

Mariam Ashtiani Julia Berger, *Secretary* Mehran Kiai, *Treasurer* Shabnam Koirala-Azad, *Chair* Martha Schweitz, *Recording Secretary*

Derik Smith, Vice Chair

Journal of Bahá'í Studies Editorial Committee

Ann Boyles

Roshan Danesh

Nilufar Gordon, Editorial Coordinator

John Hatcher, *Editor* Pierre-Yves Mocquais

Michael Sabet, Assistant Editor

Bahhaj Taherzadeh Valerie Warder

Peter Murphy, Poetry Editor

Association of the Friends of Persian Culture Board of Directors

Nooshin Agahi Guitty Ejtemai Hermien Hoveydai Jaleh Joubine-Khadem Omid Milani Kambiz Mobini

Gita Nabili Fuad Ziai

Persian Bahá'í Media Service Fund Development Group

Vida Aghdasi Taraneh Darabi Fariba Talebi Eghaneyan Foad Haghighi Neda Najibi Sana Rouhani Gouya Zamani

Bahá'í Studies Publications Editorial Committee

John Hatcher, *Editor* Mehran Kiai Pierre-Yves Mocquais Martha Schweitz

Bahá'í Center Assistance Corporation Board

Carl D. Clingenpeel, *Secretary*Sharon Dixon-Peay
Farzad Ferdowsi
Ronald Lillejord, *Treasurer*Kerry L. Jones Mogharebi
Farshad Monfared, *Vice Chair*Lee Ratcliff, *Chair*

Bahá'í Service for the Blind Committee

Robert Dickson Bill Peary Margaret Tash

Health for Humanity Board of Directors

Jon Bruss Babak Etemad Gity Etemad William McMiller, *Vice Chair* John Safapour, *Secretary* Geoffrey Wilson, *Chair and Treasurer*

